

# THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1897.

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## PEACE WITH HONOUR.

BY SYDNEY C. GRIER, AUTHOR OF "IN FURTHEST IND," ETC.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

#### A PROFESSIONAL SUMMONS.

THE long hours of another day and night dragged slowly away, and still Sir Dugald's condition remained unchanged. To see him lying on his bed with half-closed eyes, speechless and incapable of moving, was so terrible to Lady Haigh that she hoped fervently that Georgia's conjecture that he was partially conscious of what passed around him might not be true. To know himself absolutely powerless, to perceive that things were going wrong but to be unable to rectify them, she could imagine no keener torment for a man of his stamp. If he continued in this state, she said to herself remorsefully, as she administered the liquids which were the only nourishment he could swallow, she would be inclined to allow Georgia to have her way, in spite of the misgivings of Stratford and North, for nothing could be worse than this living death. Even now, "If you could only tell me you were sure it was poison, Georgie dear," she said, "I would put him into your hands unreservedly, but as it is, the risk is too fearful. He is all I have, you know." And although Georgia regretted the decision, it did not affect her as the opposition of the men had done, for she knew that Lady Haigh would have withstood any male doctor with exactly the same pertinacity under the circumstances.

The political duties of the mission were somewhat in abeyance just now, for Sir Dugald's illness rendered it impossible to initiate any fresh diplomatic action, and this enforced idleness had its effect on the spirits of all. Even Fitz had lost his cheerfulness, and the kitten escaped its daily lesson in gymnastics. Kustendjian, his official services not being required, spent most of his time in his own quarters, where, as he informed Stratford with appropriate seriousness

of demeanour, he occupied himself in making his will, and in writing farewell letters to his friends. In spite, or perhaps in consequence, of the lack of active occupation, however, the post which Sir Dugald had bequeathed to Stratford promised to be no sinecure, more especially as Dick, since his interview with Georgia, had been in a villainously bad temper, and snapped at everyone in a way that made his friend long to kick him.

"They all want a desperate emergency to rouse them up," said the harassed commander to himself. "This monotonous life within four walls, full of suspense, would get on anybody's nerves, and they will take to quarrelling soon. When that happens, it's all up with us. I shall have to go and eat humble pie to Miss Keeling, and ask her not to treat North quite so much like an officious stranger who has spoken to her without an introduction, if this goes on. As the acting head of affairs, I could put it to her that her method of exercising discipline has a distinctly bad effect on the *morale* of the force."

The emergency which Stratford desired was closer at hand than he expected when he longed for it, and as is usually the case with emergencies, it did not arrive quite in the form which he would have chosen had he been consulted. Its inception was marked by the in no way unusual event of the arrival of Fath-ud-Din, desiring to re-open negotiations, on the morning of the second day after Sir Dugald's seizure. All the day before, so the Vizier averred, he had been expecting to receive a message summoning him back to the mission, and announcing that his terms were accepted. Hearing nothing, he might well have gone straight to the Scythian envoy, and concluded an arrangement with him, but so great was the esteem which he felt for the English, and especially for the members of the present expedition, and so high was the King's appreciation of the power and good fortune of the British Empire, that he was loth to bring about a definite rupture of diplomatic relations. He had returned, therefore, to explain his offer once more to Sir Dugald, and to find out whether it was impossible to effect a compromise.

Stratford was by no means anxious to undertake the delicate task of endeavouring to resist the Vizier's blandishments without turning him into an open enemy, and did his best to postpone the evil day by telling him that Sir Dugald was indisposed, and could not be troubled with business. But Fath-ud-Din displayed so much anxiety to see the Envoy, even though only for a moment, and in bed, that Stratford, in order to avoid the discovery of Sir Dugald's real condition, no whisper of which had as yet been allowed to creep out into the town, was obliged to say that Sir Dugald must not be disturbed, but that he had delegated the conduct of affairs to him.

The Vizier showed great interest in this piece of news, and immediately asked for a conference with Stratford, a conference so important that the servants were to be excluded from the room, and the greatest precautions taken to prevent eavesdropping or interrup-

tion. Stratford was heartily sick of these conferences, each one of which had hitherto resulted only in the offer of terms more impossible of acceptance than those last brought forward, and he was also convinced that the failure to settle matters with the Scythian envoy was due to no compunction on the part of Fath-ud-Din, but merely to the fact that he could not get the price he wanted. Still, even in view of the further possibility that the arrangement with Scythia had after all been entered into, and that the present visit was simply a blind, the Vizier's request could not very well be refused, and a move was made into the Durbar-hall from the verandah, the servants being placed to guard the doors.

On the terrace in the inner court Lady Haigh, who had come outside for a breath of fresh air, was discussing the position of affairs with Georgia. They had not yet reached the point at which conversation of this kind ceases to bring some comfort, or at any rate, distraction, for despair must be very near at hand when no one cares any longer to inquire "What is to be done?" and when there is no one else to take up the challenge and suggest some measure of relief, however impracticable. To them, as they sat there, came a messenger from Ismail Baksh the gatekeeper, saying that there was a negro at the door belonging to the Palace harem, and asking whether he was to be admitted. Lady Haigh had him brought in at once, when he explained that he bore a message to the doctor lady, entreating her to come to the Palace immediately. The litter and the escort of horsemen were waiting outside, for Ismail Baksh would not hear of admitting them into the courtyard without orders from Stratford, and Stratford was not to be disturbed.

"Shall you go, Georgie?" asked Lady Haigh.

"Of course," returned Georgia, astonished by the question. "I am afraid something must have gone wrong with the Queen's eyes. I only hope they haven't undone the bandages too soon."

"I think that perhaps it might be as well to ask the gentlemen what their opinion is before going."

"I really do not propose to ask leave from Mr. Stratford and Major North before I go to visit my patients," said Georgia, stiffening visibly.

"But they might have some reason for objecting. Of course, they have said nothing of the kind, and it may be only my fancy, but I don't quite like your going, Georgie. It doesn't seem safe, after the things that have happened lately."

"Why, Lady Haigh, you wouldn't have me disregard a professional summons on the plea of danger?" said Georgia, taking the *burka* which Rahah had brought her, and arraying herself in it.

"No, of course not; but I don't feel certain about this one, somehow. In any case, Georgie, promise me that you will not take anything to eat or to drink at the Palace."

"Nothing but coffee, at any rate," said Georgia. "When Nur

Jahan pours it out for me herself, and takes a sip from the cup to show that it is all right, I can't hurt her feelings by refusing it."

"I wish I could ask Mr. Stratford what he thinks," said Lady Haigh, reverting to her former subject. "It could do no harm."

"But you don't think that he can see further into a mill-stone than you can, do you, Lady Haigh? What difference could it make what he thought? He doesn't know anything more than we do, and I am sure he couldn't conjure up worse fears than those we have been indulging in lately."

"He might think it better that you should not go," said Lady Haigh, without considering the effect of her words.

"Then we may regard it as just as well that he is not here, since what he thought would make no difference to me," said Georgia, with an ominous tightening of the lips. "Are you ready, Rahah?"

And the two veiled figures passed under the archway and through the outer court, entering the litter at the gate without attracting the attention of any of the diplomatists in the Durbar-hall, about the doors of which Lady Haigh hovered unhappily for two or three minutes, feeling undecided how to act, and only returned to her own domain on being assured repeatedly by the servants that the conference was on no account to be interrupted. She went slowly back to Sir Dugald's sick room, and sat down by the bedside; but she could not be still. An unwonted restlessness was upon her, impelling her to move about the room and alter the position of every medicine-bottle and every piece of furniture in it. Presently she stepped out again on the terrace, and looked across at Bachelors' Buildings, feeling half-inclined to force her way into the Durbar-hall and interrupt the conference; but she scolded herself for her folly, and returned to her patient. What good could it possibly do to break up the durbar by calling Mr. Stratford out in order to communicate to him the momentous intelligence that Miss Keeling had gone to visit her patient at the Palace? It was with this very object in view that she had come to Kubbet-ul-Haj.

"I am getting nervous," said Lady Haigh to herself, "and I have always been so proud of being absolutely without nerves! I won't give in to it. What is there to be frightened about? Georgia has gone to the Palace over and over again, and I have never minded it a bit."

Nevertheless, she wandered desolately from the sick room to the terrace and back again several times, and heaved a sigh of relief when she caught a glimpse through the archway of a bustle in the outer court, and gathered that the Vizier was taking his leave. Presently Stratford and Dick came in sight, and she had just time to decide that she would not trouble them with her ridiculous fancies, before they mounted the steps.

"Well, had Fath-ud-Din anything new to propose?" she asked.

"Oh, no," returned Stratford, with ineffable weariness. "It was



the same old game all through. He wanted to bribe us to sign his treaty, or he didn't mind our bribing him to sign ours. He has raised his terms, though—I think he imagines that we are of a more squeezable disposition than the Chief. He wants ten thousand pounds for himself, and a written promise that the Government will support Antar Khan in case of the King's death. A little secret treaty all to himself would just meet his views."

"He is really very tiresome," said Lady Haigh sympathetically. "One feels so dreadfully undignified staying on like this, when he is always making such insulting offers. I don't want to interfere in your department, Mr. Stratford, but if we hear nothing soon—say to-day or to-morrow—from Jahan Beg, would it not be advisable to think about sending a messenger to report our position at Fort Rahmat-Ullah?"

"I think of it continually," said Stratford, "but none of us here could hope to leave the city without being recognised, and if they mean to cut us off from communication with Khemistan, it would be certain death to the man who ventured to start, while we should be as badly off as ever."

"Still, we can't spend the term of our natural lives shut up here," began Lady Haigh emphatically, but Dick interrupted her.

"I'll go," he said promptly; "it's just the sort of thing I like. I have nothing to keep me here, and nothing to do. I am positively yearning for a job. I'll start to-night."

"Gently," said Stratford. "We must figure out a plan of campaign first. But if anyone could get through, North, you could, to judge by your Rahmat-Ullah performance, and Fath-ud-Din's language to-day was really so unpleasantly threatening that I think it is time for us to make tracks."

"Did he go so far as to threaten you?" asked Lady Haigh.

"There certainly seemed to be a distinct suggestion of menace in his words, and that not merely the old bugbear of the Scythian envoy. But of course it may be all bounce. Hullo! I wonder I didn't murder this little animal." He stooped and lifted the white kitten, which had made a sudden dash at his shoe-lace from an ambush near at hand. "Why aren't you with your mistress, Colleen Bawn? I thought you always stuck to her."

"Oh, Miss Keeling can't take her to the Palace," said Lady Haigh, with a nervous little laugh. "It wouldn't look professional, you know."

"Miss Keeling gone to the Palace!" Stratford's eye sought Dick's, but met no answering glance. "Why should she have gone just now? I thought the operation was over."

"Oh, the Queen sent a message to beg her to come, and she was afraid something must have gone wrong, so she hurried off. You don't think there is any reason why she should not have gone, do you?"

"I don't know. It seems absurd, but I feel more at ease when we are all safe inside these walls. I can't think how it is that we didn't hear Miss Keeling start."

"Oh, the escort did not come into the court, because Ismail Baksh would not open the gate, and we could not tell you she was going, for the servants said you were not to be interrupted."

"That was Fath-ud-Din's doing. It looks very fishy altogether. I hope it's not a trap. I suppose there's no possibility of stopping her now before she gets to the Palace?"

"Dear me, no!" said Lady Haigh, with conviction. "She ought to be on her way back by this time. No, it's quite clear that we can do nothing."

"Except await events," said Stratford drearily, and Lady Haigh remembered that she had left Sir Dugald alone for a long time, and returned to his side, not much comforted.

In the meantime, Georgia had reached the Palace without mishap, and on sending a message by one of the slave-girls, was welcomed at the door of the harem by Nur Jahan. To her dismay, she found the girl in deep mourning. She wore no jewels, her hair was unbraided, her dress was coarse and squalid, and her feet bare.

"What is the matter, Nur Jahan?" asked Georgia anxiously. "Has anything gone wrong with the Queen or Rustam Khan, or is it your baby?"

"It is my father," said Nur Jahan, in a hurried whisper, so low that Rahah was obliged to come quite close in order to translate what she said. "O doctor lady, hast thou not heard? He was seized eleven days ago, and thrown into prison, by order of our lord the King."

"But he is not dead?"

"God knows," said Nur Jahan. "It may even be that, but we have not heard it. We know not where he is, nor what has befallen him since he was led away."

Georgia gasped. This news was the death-blow to the hopes which the party at the Mission had been cherishing. It was evident that Jahan Beg had been arrested almost immediately after his last colloquy with Sir Dugald, and before he could take any steps with reference to sending a messenger to Fort Rahmat-Ullah, so that help was as far off as ever. Had the King and Fath-ud-Din discovered his visits to the Mission, or was it merely that the Vizier's hatred had at last burst its bounds? She turned to ask Nur Jahan on what charge he had been arrested, but smiled at her own folly when she remembered that in this happy land there was neither Habeas Corpus Act nor penalty for false imprisonment.

"It is good of thee to come to us, O doctor lady," said Nur Jahan. "The Queen has been wearying to hear thy voice. She said that thou hadst heard of our trouble and forsaken us; but I said that it was not so, for that where there was sorrow there wouldst thou be to comfort it."

"Then the Queen is no more cheerful than she was?"

"How should she be, now that this new trial is come upon us? Her slaves and I have kept from her all that we could; but she guesses what we do not tell her. Only she has not wept, for she knows that would injure her eyes, and her heart longs to behold my son before she dies."

"But have you pleaded with the King for your father's life?"

"My mother has. She is his own cousin, and yet she went to him as a suppliant, and entreated mercy for her husband; but he refused to hear her, and the rabble of the city broke into her house and set it on fire. Then she took refuge here with her household, and we have waited in vain for news ever since."

"But does your mother live here in the King's house, and eat his bread, when he has treated her husband so badly?"

"What else could she do? Our lord the King is her uncle's son. Where could she take refuge but in his house with his wife? He will suffer no harm to happen to her, for it is only against my father that he is wroth. But I will take thee to see my mother, O doctor lady, when thou hast first visited the Queen, for her heart is sad and it may cheer her to hear thy voice."

They went on into the Queen's room, and Georgia examined the bandages and found them intact. It was as yet too early to remove them in order to discover whether the operation had been successful, and she remarked to Nur Jahan that it would have been as well not to send for her until two or three days later, when she could have superintended their removal.

"But we did not send for thee, O doctor lady," said Nur Jahan in surprise.

"Not send for me?" cried Georgia. "But I had a message from the Queen!"

Nur Jahan shook her head, and the Queen spoke in a weak, quavering voice:

"It is of my lord's kindness, then, that we behold thee, O doctor lady. When he last visited me, I was mourning that we saw thee so seldom, and now he has brought thee hither."

"I should certainly not have come for a day or two if I had known that there was no change," said Georgia; "nor should I have obeyed a message from the King, even though sent in your name." But the poor Queen's evident pleasure in her society moved her to pity, and she talked cheerfully to her for a while before taking her leave.

There were a few directions as to various points of treatment to be given to Nur Jahan, and when these had been duly explained and a fresh bottle of medicine promised, Georgia rose to go. Nur Jahan led her down the passage and into another room which was filled with women in mourning. They were all sitting on the floor round an elderly lady whose grey hair was besprinkled with dust, and they relieved one another at intervals in uttering a few words of lamentation,

and then breaking into a low, prolonged wail. Georgia had no difficulty in guessing that this was the bereaved household of Jahan Beg, and she felt some delicacy in interrupting their mournful proceedings; but Nur Jahan led her in and presented her to her mother, and the wailing women made room for her in their circle. At first she was afraid that it might be considered only proper politeness to take down her hair and cast dust upon it as they were doing; but she was not long in discovering that the duty of mourning had become a little monotonous after ten days' diligent performance of it, and that the ladies were not indisposed to welcome the slight relief and distraction which might be afforded by the foreigner's visit.

Nur Jahan's mother raised her head, shook the dust out of her eyes, and after surveying Georgia from head to foot with great interest, began the invariable catechism. Was the doctor-lady married? How had she learned her wisdom? Where did she get her clothes? Why did she do her hair in that way? Had she a father, mother, brothers, sisters? What had brought her to Kubbet-ul-Haj? Had her family raised no objections to such an extraordinary proceeding? Was the Kaisar really a woman? Was it then true that in England the women ruled and the men obeyed? Why did the doctor-lady wear no jewellery? Which member of the Mission was it that dealt in magical arts—herself, or the Envoy, or the doctor who was dead?

The Princess stopped at last for want of breath, and Georgia, having answered as many of the questions as she could remember, expressed the sorrow she had felt on account of the misfortune that had fallen upon Jahan Beg, adding a hope that he would soon be restored to liberty. From all sides came the answer that whatever happened to him would be his fate, which could not be averted; but when she asked presently to what cause his sudden arrest was to be attributed a storm of passion swept over the crowd of women. It was all the doing of Fath-ud-Din—might he die unlamented in the flower of his age! might his children live but to disgrace him! and might the graves of his parents and grandparents be dishonoured, yea, those of his ancestors to the remotest generation! After this outburst they came to definite charges, the Princess speaking first, and one woman after another chiming in with corroborative evidence.

Fath-ud-Din robbed the treasury and deceived the King, ground the faces of the honest poor, and kept the lawless rabble in his pay. He meant to place his nephew, Antar Khan, on the throne after his father instead of the rightful heir, Rustam Khan, to whom God had granted such a son as showed he was intended to be king. He had a daughter who was supposed to be the most beautiful child in Ethiopia, and he was bringing her up in the country in a fortress of his own where no one could see her, intending (such was the height of his presumption) to marry her to Antar Khan when she was old

enough. And for her guardian there he had an old woman—a sorceress, who could destroy by her magic arts any undesirable stranger that might happen to approach the fortress, for she was one of the remnant of the Poisoners, a tribe of vagrants so noted for their evil deeds that the last King of Ethiopia had swept them almost out of the land. But this woman still remained, and that she worked at her old trade for Fath-ud-Din's benefit there was no doubt, for did not all his enemies die mysteriously, and no man could tell who had hurt them? To this old woman had descended the evil secrets of the whole tribe, and she knew of poisons and antidotes with which no one else in the world was acquainted.

The women were so eager in their denunciation of the Grand Vizier that Georgia's voice was unheeded when she tried to interrupt them, for the story of the witch and her poisons had recalled to her mind the recent events at the Mission, and she was anxious to know where the old woman was to be found. But the untiring accusers were hurrying on with a catalogue of other crimes committed by Fath-ud-Din, and they were only checked by a voice from the doorway.

"Dost thou not fear, O wife of Jahan Beg, thus with thy women to speak evil of those in authority? The arm of the Vizier has power to reach even to the house of the King."

"The cat may seize the mouse, O mother of Antar Khan," replied the Princess with dignity, "but the mouse may squeak."

The intruder laughed contemptuously and waddled into the room between the rows of women, who had risen at her entrance. She was still a young woman, and might have been considered beautiful but for her exceeding stoutness (a quality which is not, however, considered a defect in Ethiopia), and she was dressed with the utmost magnificence of which Kubbet-ul-Haj could boast. Rich satins of varying colours, Kashmir shawls, and transparent gauzes were heaped upon her person in a way which declared them to be intended for display rather than for use; her eyelids were blackened, and her hands and lips reddened, and she was literally loaded with jewels. Several women followed her, in one of whom Georgia recognised the girl who had shouted across the courtyard to her on the last occasion of her visiting the Palace, and these also had donned all their finest possessions in preparation for paying this call. It was the direst insult to come dressed in such a style for a visit which was nominally one of condolence; but Nur Jahan's mother dissembled her wrath, and invited the young Queen to take a seat on the divan, while her attendants grouped themselves around her. When the visitor was comfortably settled, and had been accommodated with a pipe, she favoured Georgia with a prolonged stare.

"Thou art the English doctor-woman?" she asked, so insolently that her maids giggled at the tone.

"I am," returned Georgia, looking her over calmly.

"Why hast thou never visited me, to eat bread in my chamber?"

"I have never received an invitation," said Georgia.

Antar Khan's mother turned to her attendants.

"Hear the doctor-lady!" she cried. "She is waiting for an invitation, instead of sending humbly to ask that she might be allowed to kiss the Queen's feet!"

Not considering that so self-evident a fact called for comment, Georgia remained silent, which her assailant was unable to do.

"Think not that I came here to see thee," she said.

"Oh, not at all," said Georgia pleasantly; and there was a suspicious tremble in Rahah's voice as she translated the answer.

"Because, if I desire it, I shall be able to see thee continually from henceforth," pursued the Queen. "But," she added, with deep meaning, "I shall not desire it. I would not have thee in my sight."

Georgia lifted her eyebrows slightly at this enigmatic and apparently uncalled-for remark, an action which seemed to irritate her opponent very much. She leaned forward when she spoke next, and her tone was full of menace.

"Thou art here—in the Palace."

"I believe so," returned Georgia, in some surprise.

"But how wilt thou depart hence—and when?"

"In a few minutes, and as I came, I suppose."

The Queen laughed shrilly, and her women joined their voices with hers.

"Thou wilt never leave the Palace, O doctor-lady. Before thou canst return to thy people there is a life to be given for thine, and who is there that will lay down his life for thee? Thou hast neither husband, nor father, nor brother, and what man is there that will give his life for a woman that is not even of his house?"

Georgia's heart was in her mouth as the full import of the words dawned upon her; but she turned quietly to Nur Jahan's mother.

"I never care to prescribe for patients in public," she said.

"Would it be possible for me to see the Queen in a separate room, with, perhaps, one of her attendants?"

A thrill of expectation went round the circle as Rahah translated the words with much emphasis. Georgia singled out an old woman standing behind the Queen.

"Tell me, O my mother," she said, "whether thou hast long observed these symptoms in thy mistress? Is she often like this? Speak freely, for I cannot hope to cure her unless I know the truth."

"Is the doctor-woman saying that I am mad?" burst forth the Queen, glaring round at her attendants, whose faces assumed immediately an expression of pious horror, although they were unable to answer in the negative. "I will show thee whether I am mad, thou infidel daughter of a dog!" she cried. "My lord shall give thee into my hands, and thou shalt know what I have wit to do."

"I think not," said Georgia with a smile, as her fingers closed on



the butt of a little revolver she carried in a special pocket. Her feelings were so highly wrought that it was easier for her at the moment to smile than to speak, but the smile seemed to rouse her adversary to fury. She burst into a storm of threats and revilings such as Rahah declined to translate; but Georgia gathered the impression that anyone who was so unfortunate as to fall into the hands of Antar Khan's mother as a prisoner would have little mercy to hope for, and might well welcome death as the chief blessing on earth. She rose and folded her *burka* around her, and addressed the Princess.

"I fear my presence merely excites the patient," she said; "and therefore I will go now. Perhaps I shall be able to see her another day when she is quieter, and there are not so many people present."

"Yes, go!" echoed the Queen and her women. "Go, if thou canst!"

Accompanied by Nur Jahan, and followed by Rahah, Georgia walked down the passage to the door. As had been the case on the previous occasion, the litter was not there. Turning to Nur Jahan, Georgia asked her to send one of the slave-girls to summon it.

"O doctor lady," whispered Nur Jahan fearfully, "it is no use. There is evil intended against thee. Come back and remain in the chamber of my lord's mother. It may be that they would not dare to drag thee from her presence."

"Are you also turning against me, Nur Jahan? Send the woman at once, if you please. I shall not stay here."

Tremblingly Nur Jahan obeyed, while the young Queen and her women, who had followed them out, laughed and jeered.

"Never again wilt thou enter the litter, O doctor lady. It is well to give orders, but it is ill when they are not obeyed."

Nevertheless, after a delay of a few minutes, the litter appeared, to Georgia's own astonishment, and the utter stupefaction of the Ethiopian women. Georgia's spirits rose as she stepped into it, followed by Rahah, and she allowed herself to think that the Queen's mysterious threats and extraordinary conduct had been part of a spiteful joke.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### AN ULTIMATUM.

As the morning hours passed on, the feeling of uneasiness at the Mission grew in intensity. Although Georgia's visits to the Palace were rarely less than two hours in duration, and another hour must be allowed for the journey thither and the return, she had not been gone an hour and a half before Lady Haigh began to appear from the sick room at intervals of ten minutes, and inquire whether she

had not come back yet. The men waited on the terrace, too full of anxiety to settle to any occupation, and the servants watched them furtively as they went about their duties. Whether the uneasiness was due to the Vizier's threat, or to a feeling that the tension which had so long existed had nearly reached breaking-point, everyone seemed to be conscious that there was danger in the air.

At length the shouts of running footmen at the outer gates announced an arrival of importance, and a sigh of relief broke from the watchers on the terrace. Miss Keeling had returned in safety, after all, but this was the last time that she should leave the Mission unaccompanied, and confide in the tender mercies of the sovereign of Ethiopia and his Ministers. But the shouts were not followed by the usual sounds of the creaking open of the ponderous gates and the rush of feet into the courtyard as the litter was carried up to the steps; but only by a parleying between Ismail Baksh and someone outside, which was audible in the inner court owing to the loud tones in which it was conducted, although the actual words could not be distinguished. Presently a servant approached the group through the archway.

"Highness," he said, addressing Stratford, "there are two lords outside, belonging to the King's court, who desire to speak with the Sahibs, but they will not come inside the gate."

"Whence this exceeding caution?" said Stratford as he descended the steps. "They have never displayed any reluctance to come in before."

No one replied to his observation, and he went towards the gate, the other men following him, with Lady Haigh, uninvited and unnoticed, close at their heels. One of the doors was opened as they advanced, and they found themselves face to face with their old friend, the official who had met them on their first arrival in the city, and introduced them to their present quarters. Now he looked uneasy and as though ashamed of the business on which he had come, while at his side was a hard-faced, eager man, whom the English recognised as one of Fath-ud-Din's chief supporters among the Amirs.

"Peace be upon you!" said Stratford.

"And upon thee be peace!" was the stereotyped reply.

"Will you not enter and eat bread with us?" asked Stratford.

"My lord's servants are commanded not to enter his house, nor yet to break bread with him and his young men," returned the official, "for their errand demands haste. Is the gracious lord, the Queen of England's Envoy, yet recovered of his sickness?"

"No, he is still indisposed, and I am here in his place," said Stratford, restraining his impatience with an effort.

"Will my lord command his own servants to withdraw a space?" pursued the ambassador, evidently embarrassed, "for I have to mention one who belongs to the great lord's household."

Stratford signed to the servants to withdraw a little, but intimated that Dick and Fitz were equally interested with himself in the matter now to be disclosed, while Kustendjian was necessary as interpreter. This having been made clear, they waited with breathless eagerness, for the ambassador seemed very much at a loss for words.

"My lord knows," he said at last, "that the English doctor lady came this day to visit the household of our lord the King?"

"I know that she received an urgent message in the Queen's name entreating her to come to the Palace, and that she hastened there at once," said Stratford. The official seemed unable to proceed, and his colleague took up the tale.

"However that may be," he said, "the doctor lady is now in the hands of our lord the king."

"And how is that, pray?" asked Stratford. "Since when has the King of Ethiopia adopted the plan of getting women into his power by false messages, and then kidnapping them?"

"In dealing with enemies and infidels, our lord the King pays more heed to the end than to the means," said the Amir.

"So it seems," said Stratford drily, "but does he fight with women?"

"Nay," said the official, plucking up courage to speak again; "he fights with men, and therefore it is that we are here."

"The king is evidently in need of money, and requires a ransom," said Stratford, turning to the rest, and speaking with an airy confidence which he was far from feeling. "How much does he want?" he asked of the messengers.

"Our lord desires not money, nor does he war with women," repeated the Amir. "In exchange for the woman he requires a man."

A gasp from Fitz, an exclamation from Dick, and a stifled cry from Lady Haigh warned Stratford of the effect the announcement of the King's demand had produced on his friends. His own nerves were like steel and his voice rang out clearly as he asked, "And who is it that the King requires?"

"My lord must see," said the old official reluctantly, "that our lord the King desires him who is chief in authority among you to be sent to him, that he may make the treaty with him which the Queen of England desired when she sent her servants hither."

"But we desire nothing more than that the King should sign that very treaty," objected Stratford.

"But my lord's treaty is not the King's treaty," was the unanswerable reply of the ambassador.

"And if the man you desire should go to the Palace, and yet refuse to sign the King's treaty, what then?" asked Stratford.

"It is not for the health of any man to withstand our lord the King," was the evasive answer.

"But if—if the man was not given up," broke in the agitated voice of Fitz from behind, "what would happen to the lady?"

"Oh, the woman would die—in a day or two," was the instant reply of the Amir, delighted to perceive his opportunity. "Not by the hands of the King's executioners—that would be a man's death. No, women can deal with women. There are certain in our lord the King's household who bear no love to the doctor-lady. I do not say that they would kill her; but she would not live very long under their hands—a day, perhaps, or it may be two. And it would not be an easy death."

"For God's sake, Stratford, put a stop to this!" muttered Dick hoarsely, his face convulsed with rage. "Tell them I will go."

"Unless," pursued the Amir, apparently heedless of the interruption, although his greedy eyes had not missed the slightest change in the expression of any of the faces before him, "the woman should find favour in the eyes of our lord the King. Then she would live for a time. Afterwards it would be much the same; but whether——"

But the alternative which he had been about to state was left unuttered, for Dick sprang forward and dealt him a blow which stretched him on the ground.

"Say that again if you dare!" he growled, standing over him with clenched fists; but the Amir, evidently considering that discretion was the better part of valour, submitted to be helped up and brushed by his attendants, after which he retired to the rear—Dick turning contemptuously on his heel and resuming his post beside Stratford.

"Let not my lord heed the sayings of that man," entreated the old official, "for he has an evil tongue and loves to stir up strife."

"Then is what he says not true?" asked Stratford sternly. And, divided between a desire to maintain the effect produced and the fear of Dick's fist, the ambassador preferred to take refuge in silence.

"We will consult together about the matter and let you know our decision presently," said Stratford, after waiting in vain for an answer. "If you will not enter, the servants shall spread carpets at the gate for you."

The official expressed his gratitude for the courtesy, and the little party of English retired to the inner court in silence, a silence which was broken by Fitz as soon as they reached the terrace.

"What do you intend to do?" he demanded of Stratford, glaring at him with eyes still full of the horror inspired by what he had just heard.

"Don't ask me!" said Lady Haigh, taking the question as addressed to herself, and sitting down at the table she began to sob heavily. "I shall become a gibbering idiot if this sort of thing goes on," she wailed.

"I don't know what you wanted to pretend to discuss things for," said Dick gruffly. "What's the good of fooling about with consultations when I told you I was going?"

"Excuse me," said Stratford, "you are quite mistaken. I am going."

Lady Haigh ceased her sobs and looked at him in astonishment, while Dick uttered an inarticulate exclamation. Fitz alone retained the power of speech.

"Let me go, Mr. Stratford," he entreated. "Not you; you can't be spared. My life isn't of any value; but every one here depends on you in this fix. I would do anything for Miss Keeling, and be proud to do it. You will let me go, won't you? It doesn't signify what happens to me."

"Stuff and nonsense, Anstruther!" said Stratford good-humouredly. "There is plenty for you to do yet. Don't you see that when the King has demanded the man in authority, he is scarcely likely to be willing to accept you instead? You are pretty well known in Kubbet-ul-Haj, certainly; but, although Fath-ud-Din might be glad to welcome you as a fellow-victim with me, he would hardly regard you with favour as a substitute."

"What are we to do without you, Mr. Stratford?" asked Lady Haigh piteously. "Sir Dugald left everything in your charge."

"We must trust that the King will prove to be less bloodthirsty than his Ministers," he answered. "I am not without hopes of making him listen to reason. Still, one must prepare for the worst, of course. North, if you will come with me to the office a minute, I will give you the keys and the seal, and just put you in the way of things a little."

Dick followed him in silence; but when they had entered the office he shut the door and put his back against it.

"Look here, Stratford," he said, "you have got to let me go. It is my right, I tell you. I—I love her."

"Of course you do," returned Stratford. "I have seen that for some time. That is why I am glad that you will be left to take care of her. You will have your work cut out for you if you are to get back to Khemistan after this——"

"Stratford," said Dick earnestly, "listen to me. This is my business, and it is very unfriendly of you, though you mean well, to try to take it from me. I intend to go."

"Excuse me," said Stratford, "but it is my business too. No, I am not hinting at cutting you out, old man—I couldn't do it if I would. My reason for going is totally unconnected with Miss Keeling, except in so far as her danger has brought things to a climax. I am not going to sign Fath-ud-Din's treaty; but neither do I intend to be killed if I can help it. I shall take our treaty with me, and if I leave the Palace alive I shall bring that treaty out with me, signed. You will observe that it is not for Miss Keeling that I am risking my life, but simply on a matter of business. I stake my life against the treaty, and if I keep the one I gain the other. Of course, if I fail I lose both. Now do you see it?"

"But I could look after the treaty just the same," urged Dick.

"No, you couldn't. You are not a diplomatist, North; you are a soldier, and tact is not exactly your strong point. I know that you could die like a hero; but you don't shine in statecraft, and I am anxious that no dying shall be necessary, if that is possible. You understand? It is a matter of personal moment to me to get this treaty signed, and I ask you, as a favour, to waive your claim to sacrifice yourself for Miss Keeling."

"Oh, hang it all!" burst forth Dick. "When you put it in that way, Stratford, what can a man do but make a fool of himself, and let you go? It's my right, and you take away from me my only chance of showing her that I would die for her, though I can't manage to please her. But we have rubbed through a good deal together, you and I—oh, there! you can go."

"Thanks, old man; I thought I knew your sort. That's settled, then. By-the-bye, if they should put an end to me it is just possible that they might have someone there capable of imitating my writing. They must have seen my signature on notes and things of that kind. Well, if I sign any treaty you will find the words run into one another, so that the *Egerton* is joined to the *Stratford*. That is the test of genuineness, do you see?"

"All right."

"I leave you in charge of everything here, of course. I am very much afraid that Jahan Beg must have come to grief, so don't depend upon him any longer. You won't be able to leave the Mission yourself now, of course; but if you can get one of the servants to venture, send him off to Fort Rahmat-Ullah. The absence of news ought to have put them on the alert, and if they have any sense they will be preparing a rescue expedition already; but you can't count on that. If you see the faintest chance of getting everyone off safely, I charge you most solemnly to seize it at once, without waiting to see what has become of me. Such a message as this means war to the knife, and you must take any opportunity that offers of an escort, for to fight your way through Ethiopia would be an impossibility, with the women and the Chief to guard, and no horses. Perhaps Hicks might join forces with you, if you approached him in a proper spirit, and he would be a real acquisition, for he has a good number of armed servants, and has seen something of Indian fighting on the plains. If he doesn't see it, you may have to stand a siege here until relief arrives; but what you are to do about food I don't know. I can't attempt to give you directions. All I say is, if the worst comes to the worst, leave me and the treaty alone, and escape as best you can."

"All right," said Dick again.

"Here are the keys. Young Anstruther will show you how the papers are arranged. And, by-the-bye, if I don't come back send my things to my sister, Mrs. Rowcroft, Branscombe Vicarage, Homeshire,



and tell her how it was. She is the only near relation I have, and we haven't met for nearly twenty years."

They left the office together, and returned to the terrace.

"Mayn't I go, Mr. Stratford?" cried Fitz, starting up to meet them.

"Certainly not. I told you that before."

"Mightn't I come with you, then? We could fight back to back, you know."

"No, thanks. But I will borrow that large old-fashioned pistol of yours, if you have no objection. You will probably not see it again in any case, so don't lend it me if it is a favourite."

Fitz was off immediately, and Stratford turned to Lady Haigh.

"You will think me an unconscionable borrower," he said, "but there is a miniature revolver of Sir Dugald's for the loan of which I should be most grateful. It is smaller than any of ours, and easier to hide."

"I will tell Chanda Lal to look it out at once," said Lady Haigh, and went to find the bearer.

"Now, Mr. Kustendjian, I should like our treaty, please," said Stratford. "You have nearly finished the second copy of it, I think?"

"Nearly," said the Armenian, whose English seemed almost to have forsaken him under the influence of horror. "You will have need of me, Mr. Stratford?"

"No, indeed. I will take no one into danger with me. Thank you, Mr. Anstruther," as Fitz reappeared with a large brass-mounted pistol. "I will load it simply with powder, I think. It will be less dangerous if it should happen to go off in my coat-pocket. There! How does that look?"

"It sticks out a good deal," said Fitz, surveying the coat critically. "Anyone could see that you had a pistol in that pocket."

"That is exactly the impression I wish to produce. One thing more you can do for me, Mr. Anstruther. Just rummage among the stores, and see whether you can find any description of food that has a good deal of nourishment in very small compass."

Fitz departed again, and presently Lady Haigh returned with the little revolver, which Stratford loaded carefully and slipped up his left coat-sleeve. Dick and Kustendjian watched him curiously and with respect. It was evident that he had some plan in his head; but neither of them could divine what it was. A minute or two later Fitz came up the steps with a box of meat lozenges in his hand, and presented it to him.

"Will these do, Mr. Stratford?" he asked. "They were the smallest things I could find. There were tinned soups, of course, and chocolate; but I thought these would have more nourishment in them."

"Quite right," said Stratford; "they are the very thing. Is that the treaty, Mr. Kustendjian? I think my preparations are complete, then. You will say good-bye to the Chief for me when he is better, Lady Haigh?"

"Must you go?" whispered Lady Haigh hoarsely, as she held his hand.

"I must," he said. "If I should escape, Sir Dugald's work will have been completed. You will like to remember that."

"I shall ride to the Palace with you," said Dick, as they went down the steps.

"It will be just as well, for you will be able to escort Miss Keeling back. It would be a pity for them to keep her in their hands after all."

Another interruption met them as they emerged from the archway into the outer court. Waiting for them there, with his hand raised to the salute, was old Ismail Baksh the gatekeeper, a former trooper of the Khemistan Horse, the celebrated force to which Dick belonged, and which had been enlisted in the first instance by Georgia's father, General Keeling.

"Will my lord tell his servant," he asked Stratford, "whether it is true what they are saying among the servant-people, that my lord goes to the Palace to give his life for the doctor-lady's?"

"It is true," answered Stratford.

"Let my lord listen to his servant, for it is not fitting that my lord should accept death for the sake of one who has no claim on him. I served for ten years under Sinjā Kilin the general, and I will go in my lord's place, because I have eaten of Sinjā Kilin's salt, and it is not right that his daughter should come to shame or harm while Ismail Baksh lives."

"Your loyalty to your old general is only what I should have expected from you, Ismail Baksh, but the King demands my presence, and not another's."

"But would my lord sacrifice himself for a woman—and that woman not even of his house?"

"I would do it for a woman, Ismail Baksh, and so would any of us, when we would not do it for a man."

"It is the way of the English," said Ismail Baksh thoughtfully, with grieved surprise in his tone. "That my lord should give his life for his lord, the Envoy of the Empress, would be no great matter, but for a woman!"

Stratford laughed.

"Not only I, but all three of us, Ismail Baksh, would have given our lives rather than that a hair of the doctor-lady's head should be injured."

"God forbid!" said Ismail Baksh piously. "Let not my lord speak such words in the hearing of the scum of the earth out yonder, or there will be none, either of Englishmen or women, to see Khemistan again."

"You observe that, North?" said Stratford. "Any undue display of chivalrous sentiments here is likely to land you deeper in difficulties, so keep them to yourself. Chivalry is at a discount in Kubbet-ul-Haj."

They mounted their horses, and accompanied the ambassadors back to the Palace, half a dozen armed servants following them, in case the King should show a disposition to claim Dick's life as well as that of Stratford in exchange for Georgia. When the greater part of the journey had been accomplished, and the frowning walls of the Palace courtyard were just in sight, they met the well-known procession of slaves and soldiers guarding the litter, which had so often come to the Mission to fetch the doctor-lady.

"Evidently they sent off a swift messenger to tell them that we accepted the terms, and the King is anxious to show that he confides in our good faith," said Stratford. "Funny mixture, isn't he? Well, you will turn back here, North, I suppose? There is no particular use in your coming on further."

"Let me go instead of you," entreated Dick once more.

"My dear fellow, haven't I wasted enough breath on you yet? I thought we had threshed all that out long ago, and that you were quite convinced. By-the-bye, now that we are abreast of the litter, it might be as well for you to make sure that Miss Keeling really is inside. It would be awkward to be fooled now."

Doggedly Dick pushed his way through the guards, and raised the curtain of the litter, in spite of the loud protests of the slaves. He was fully prepared for a trick; but the eyes which looked up at him through the lattice-work of the *burka* were unmistakably Georgia's, and it was undeniably Rahah who flung herself forward to draw the curtain close again, with a shrill rebuke to the slaves for letting some drunken wretch approach the litter.

"Why, Major North, is it you?" asked Georgia in astonishment. "Is anything the matter?"

"Not much—not exactly," he stammered. "I—he—we fancied it might be safer if I turned up to escort you home."

"It was very kind of you," said Georgia gratefully. "We had rather a fright at the Palace; but I will tell you about it presently."

"Yes—very well," he muttered incoherently, and, drawing the curtain again, turned to Stratford; but his lips refused to perform their office. Stratford held out his hand.

"Good-bye, old man," he said. "God help you with the job you will have in hand now."

"God bless you, Stratford!" burst from Dick. "I wish with all my soul that I was in your place at this moment."

He wrung Stratford's hand, and turned silently to follow the litter with the servants, while the ambassadors and their prisoner rode on towards the Palace.

"How shall I ever tell her?" was the question which agitated Dick's mind as they neared the Mission. He knew enough of Georgia to feel sure that, if she had been made acquainted with the terms of the King's ultimatum, she would promptly have gone back to the Palace, and refused to allow anyone else to be sacrificed for

her, and he quailed under the anticipated necessity of informing her of what had been done. But he was saved this duty, for as he entered the Mission courtyard Mr. Hicks came hurrying to meet him.

"Well, Major," he exclaimed, "the King has been playing it pretty low down on you, I guess. I'm always glad to look on at a fair fight, and it don't so much matter to me which of the chaps gives the other beans so long as everything is done on the square. But when it comes to getting hold of a woman, and, by threatening to torture her, working on a man's highest feelings to make him give himself up instead, you may bet largely that I don't stand in with doings of that stamp—no, sir. The moment I heard a rumour of what was going on I made my darkies fly around, and in just half no time I had everything fixed up to come here. You may count on me as a fair shot with a Winchester or a six-shooter if it comes to fighting, and if old Fathud-Din and I come face to face one of us is bound to send in his checks, or I'll never look a woman in the face again. Your nation and mine are not always sweet to each other, sir; but if there's any question of a woman in danger, you may count upon Jonathan to the last drop of his blood."

"Much obliged," muttered Dick; but under his breath he grumbled, "I wish that voice of yours wasn't quite so loud."

Georgia was being helped out of the litter at the moment, and as she reached the ground she cast a quick, apprehensive glance about her. Her hand was on Dick's arm; Fitz was coming through the archway, and Kustendjian was visible on the verandah of the Durbar-hall. Ismail Baksh and his subordinates stood by the gate, looking at her with disapproving eyes, silent and grim, and her mind filled up in a moment the gaps in Mr. Hicks' speech. A sob broke from her as she stood gazing from one to the other; then her hand dropped from Dick's arm, and, gathering her *burka* around her, she passed on into the inner court. Dick followed, with a vague notion of saying something to comfort her; but at the foot of the steps she turned and faced him.

"You let Mr. Stratford go to the Palace in exchange for me—you let him?" she asked sharply, and waited for his answer with breathless anxiety.

"I tried to prevent him—he would go," stammered Dick.

"You let him sacrifice himself to save me? If anything happens to him I will never, never speak to you again as long as I live!" and she turned her back on him and fled up the steps. He stood looking after her, stupefied.

"She cares for him, and I never guessed it," he muttered to himself. "I might have saved him for her, and I have let him go and get himself killed by those fiends yonder!"

(To be continued.)

## THE LATE MRS. GEORGE LINNÆUS BANKS.

ON the 4th of May last, Mrs. George Linnaeus Banks—whose name is familiar to a wide circle of readers, as well as to those of the ARGOSY—passed quietly away at the age of seventy-six.

She was a native of Lancashire, and nearly all her best-known books are identified with the beloved county of her birth. She had witnessed the sudden uprising of its mighty manufacturing towns. It may well be that the commercial and middle-class interests which underlie that uprising were not the happiest medium wherein the literary faculty can work, especially a literary faculty which was sweet and simple, rather than strong and searching. Only the really powerful can merge themselves in an obscure crowd without risk of losing distinction. But since it seems that each life has a special problem to solve and a special task to do (hence those recurring experiences and pursuing circumstances which the ancients called Fate), so that which befel this lady, in protean form, was ever to make the best of the worst. And the literary fabric she chose to work in was certainly not the worst. The Manchester of her girlhood was full of picturesque places, strongly-marked personalities and vivid scenes of human struggle. These, as wrought up by her into her best-known book 'The Manchester Man,' have linked her name inseparably with her native city. "This book," says an able local critic, "now possesses for us a more than antiquarian interest, in that it enables us to realise how vast is the progress (?) the world has made in a period so wonderfully brief in comparison with the results attained." It is pleasant to know that its writer lived to see her story attain the honours of "an édition de luxe" and come forth in all the glory of antiquarian illustration and portraiture.

Mrs. Banks was the daughter of Mr. James Varley of Manchester, a chemist of good standing and one who delighted in literary, artistic and dramatic society. Her education was of the type given to girls in the earlier decades of this century—an education which, however much it may be despised according to present-day standards, certainly seems to have had this advantage, at least for clever girls like little Isabella Varley, that it left them free for omnivorous reading.

Isabella Varley's first literary efforts were in verse, in which form she continued to find great delight until the very end, though her efforts in this direction never rose high. Verse—to say nothing of poetry—does not offer the right field for the sustained industry and practical observation which were Mrs. Banks's strong points. It demands rather the spontaneity and passion in which her work fell short. "You have no genius," was once cruelly said to her by one

who was heartlessly exploiting her labours. "Well, then, at least I hope to make the best of any talent I may have," was her characteristic reply.

No right estimate either of her character or capacity can be formed apart from some glimpse into her history. Her girlhood had been sufficiently fortunate and happy, though she had not her mother's sympathy in her "bookishness"; but all her later life was heavily handicapped. She married a man full of brightest promise—one who perhaps had the spark of genius which she lacked, but who certainly lacked every high quality she possessed. Even the first years of her married life—years which she looked back on as blessed—had been marked by such episodes as his bringing to the cottage, where his young wife was working with her pen and rearing her little ones, a party of twenty or more gentlemen, whom he had met at some public meeting and to whom he had at once tendered a "hospitality" whose cost was in every sense to be met by his wife. No word of forewarning did she receive; her first hint of the matter was the sight of the party advancing down the road! He pleaded the precedent of Socrates, who is said to have committed the same indiscretion, though, be it noted, in a very different climate and under much easier social conditions. Nevertheless, it might have been well had the long-suffering wife retorted that Socrates met his Xantippe, and that if he was to copy the antique husband she should emulate the wife!

But those early trials—symptomatic as they were to any foreseeing eye—paled before what was to come. Strange bits of good fortune befel this disastrous man as they often seem to befall those who have neither will nor wisdom to secure for themselves the honest decencies of life. Some earlier episodes of the family's settling in London (after fifteen years of a wandering life) read like chapters in a romance; but strokes of external luck can do nothing for those who are unlucky in grain. The quiet, patient wife soon realised that if the family were to have a roof over their heads and daily bread to eat, it must be by her sole endeavours. She did not flinch from the task; she quietly and resolutely buckled to it.

Then began a long martyrdom, into whose details we cannot enter, and which will never be adequately told by any pen. Suffice it to say that infinite trial and endurance were faced and borne by this cultured and admirable woman, whose frame was as fragile as her heart was dauntless. Under such conditions was her best work done—her novels of 'God's Providence House,' 'The Manchester Man' itself, 'Caleb Booth's Clerk,' and 'Glory'—the intervals of these larger performances being filled by busy journalistic and magazine writing. The work was all accomplished in the "small hours" of earliest morning, the only time when she could secure domestic peace.

It was all a sad history. Those who got any glimpse behind



the scenes, however slight, marvelled at her endurance, and waited, half dreading some grim catastrophe. There seems little doubt that at least towards the end, mental infirmity was mingled with the moral aberrations of him to whom this pure, innocent life was joined by bonds which she never sought in any way to slacken. This unhappy man had gifts which might have lifted him to the top of his profession of journalist. He had insight to discover unrecognised gifts in others—there is no doubt that he suggested to Charles Dickens those courses of public readings which alone created the fortune which the great novelist left behind him, despite all his previous literary successes. He had the fine presence and popular manners which go so far to command men. He exercised influence and won confidence in marvellous fashion, at his last, using this faculty to contract debts among humble admirers—the faithful wife trying to discover what he accomplished in this direction, that she might discharge his obligations and save the innocent from suffering by him, a form of conjugal or family duty which is often utterly ignored by those who revel in a sentimental devotion which costs nothing, that a “self-sacrifice” which rather sacrifices others!

In this noble woman a divine pity and a sense of personal duty, engendered in the days of love’s romance and promise, survived the wreck of all happier wifely feeling. She managed to remain proud of her husband’s gifts, while never allowing herself to be blind to his shipwreck of them in his own person. Only last January, in the “autograph book” of a bazaar, she kindly transcribed in her old-fashioned handwriting, his best-known verse—

“I live for those who love me,  
For those who know me true,  
For the heaven that smiles above me,  
And awaits my spirit too;  
For the cause that lacks assistance,  
For the wrong that needs resistance,  
For the future in the distance,  
And the good that I can do.”

To which she appended the explanation.

“The above, quoted so frequently by Dr. Guthrie, was written by my late husband George Linnaeus Banks during our residence in Harrogate, Yorkshire, about the year 1849. It is the fifth and last stanza of the poem, ‘I live for those who love me,’ and has gone the world over,” adding some details to that effect.

The place and date of the above extract refer this poem to the earlier and happier days of married life. To read it in the light of later realities, tempts one to cynicism! But we must always remember that though social life requires that a man be judged by what he does and by what he is, yet, in the end, the final judgment is with God, who can take into account all aspirations and intentions, whether silent or expressed, and who alone can judge of the forces,

external or internal, which lift him above or degrade him below his earlier ideal. To "our own Master," the soul of each of us "stands" or "falls."

Dr. Guthrie never knew who wrote the lines which he quoted so often that I have myself heard him do so many times. After his death, his sons, writing his biography, asked me if I could discover the author. I tried in vain—finding the verse attributed to Bernard Barton, Whittier, &c. A mere accident brought the true authorship to my knowledge. I have often thought what an excellent point Dr. Guthrie's eloquence would have made, when pleading his beloved causes, could he have known the dark contrast between the poet's after life and the dream of his light-hearted youth!

When at last bereavement brought peace to the troubled household, Mrs. Banks, alas, was already not only ageing in years, but worn and broken in health. But her cheerfulness remained indomitable, and her industry unflagging. Both were much needed. The days of youth's sunshine and energy had passed, without her being able to make any storage for life's autumn and winter. She was an ant who met the fate of a grasshopper. It was "a struggle for life" to the very end.

In her little study, surrounded by scores of natural and antiquarian treasures, the walls covered by well-worn books, she sat writing and planning busily the pretty needle-work patterns with which she was thankful to eke out her income. It is a comfort that there is reason to believe that she thoroughly enjoyed all her labours, though many of her stories seem to bear traces of sheer "task work."

She loved young people; she liked to gather them about her, and entered warmly into their trials and temptations. One such with much of whose history she was affectionately linked has written to me since her death. "Several times last week I found myself crying, and for what? Not that my dear old friend had found rest, but because I should never again feel her kisses or hear her say: 'O, my dear, I am so glad to see you!'"

Her own hard and unrelenting struggle never made her self-absorbed, or separate from the needs and interests of others. Sometimes she was almost too ready to be helpful, to forget any considerations save those of the clamant needs pressed upon her notice, above all, to ignore the fact that all were not simple-hearted or sweet-natured, or upright as herself. Yet she was practical: I always remember her phrase in a letter to me concerning one of her young friends, whose sky was then clouded. "I am doing my best to keep him in collar," *i.e.* in a right attitude towards work and the discipline of life. She had never needed any force but her own to keep herself there! But she was ready to lend her gentle influence for the bracing of any less resolute brother.

Some years ago, there came to me in my far northern home, a pitiful begging letter written by one who described himself as a young

literary man, contending with ill-health and repeated disappointment. There were some points about the letter which raised my own suspicions; it was written from a city-district famous as the residence of two historically unfortunate poets, but scarcely a thrifty locality to-day. Besides, there was a whine in its wail. But for our present purpose its interest lies in a sheaf of letters forwarded with it, the writer naïvely seeming to think he could prove his woes by the amount of sympathy they had received! Among those letters was one from Mrs. Banks, perusal of which impressed me more than ever with her genuine goodness, her boundless desire to be helpful, combined with a shrewd sense of the stern realities of life. She wrote to this stranger, kindly but firmly—and though she had evidently sent him a sum which, while trifling in itself, was far more from her than are the enormous “benefactions” for which our multi-millionaires are glorified in the gates, she did not hesitate to warn him that nobody could befriend him if he did not befriend himself, and that difficulties must be grasped with resolution. “You are ill,” was the spirit of her letter, “but so am I, yet I must keep on working. You are constantly disappointed, so am I. But if we cannot succeed at some point, we must try our best at another.” It was a letter whose clear counsel, clothed in kindness, should have shamed even the shameless loafer (as was soon discovered) whose self-wrought woes had evoked it.

One wonders why Mrs. Banks never received a Civil List Pension—at least a small one. It is stated that such pensions are not now given to writers of fiction, and such a rule may well be wise; but her need had been great and her labours deserving at a period in the past when such rule certainly did not exist, as can be proved by the status of some now enjoying these pensions. Her last application for the aid of the Royal Literary Fund was rejected. There may have been some good reason for this; she may have exhausted the number of applications allowed to any one beneficiary. Still, one cannot but regret that it was so, that a point was not stretched in her favour. The whole circumstances of her life had been exceptionally hard, and she was at last involved in the hopeless and brief malady of old age.

“She had given so much, and the world gave her so little in return,” wrote a friend who knew all the truth of her character and her history.

Her end was as her life. So long infirm as to be much confined to her room, her actual last illness was very short. One who was present at the last says, “I never before realised what the end of a good woman could be. Her intellect was as clear as possible, and she took everything so naturally: unto the last thinking of the welfare of others, and, as she said, ‘Not afraid to face her work in the life beyond.’”

ISABELLA FVYIE MAYO.

THE WIZARD'S WIFE.  
A TALE OF CORSICAN REVENGE.

By F. E. M. NOTLEY.

CHAPTER I.

PETRONILLA.

"DO you love this stranger, Antonio?"

The speaker leant over a young man who, seated in a careless attitude by a table, was indolently sketching heads on a scrap of paper. He placed his hand with a hurried movement over the drawing as he answered:

"So you recognised the face, Petronilla? And yet I thought it not at all like. But how can a pencil and a hand like mine do her justice?"

A look of contempt flashed over the lady's face, yet her voice was sweet and low as she asked again:

"Do you love her, Antonio?"

"How can I tell?" he replied abstractedly, as he held the sketch at a little distance the better to observe it. "I really have not thought about love; it is you who put it into my head, marchesa."

"I!" exclaimed the marchesa, and her dark eyes flashed fire—"I put it into your head to love this heretic English!"

"Who said I loved her?" replied Antonio uneasily. "And she is neither heretic nor English, fair cousin; she is Irish, and as good a Catholic as you or I."

He folded deliberately the scrap of paper on which he had made so many attempts to draw one charming portrait, and then, taking his hat, he rose to go; but his cousin laid her hand imploringly on his arm.

"Do not be angry, Antonio," she said in a low, caressing voice. "We were children together, and we have always loved each other as brother and sister. You will not quarrel with me about this stranger, this foreign girl, whom you have only known a month?"

Antonio's handsome face flushed a dusky red, and he twisted his hat angrily between his hands.

"I have known her *two* months, Petronilla," he said coldly.

"One month or two, what does it matter?" she answered. "Would to Heaven the English had never come into Corsica!" she added passionately.

"Ah, we all know you are a Frenchwoman!" said her cousin, with

a slight sneer. "But as for me, I hate the French, and rather than live under their rule I would quit Corsica for ever."

"And go to England, I suppose?"

"Or Ireland," said Antonio with a laugh, as he got up again with the air of a man bent on departing. "Good-bye, Petronilla. When is the marquis coming home?"

"He will be back to-morrow."

She uttered the words carelessly, but her cheek grew pale, and a strange shadowy fear gleamed in her eyes an instant, ere it cowered and hid beneath their closed lids. Her cousin never noted it; humming an air gaily, he walked away, calling to his dog in the portico, and stopping a moment to caress it ere he vaulted on his horse and rode off at a swift pace. He passed the window without turning his eyes towards the beautiful face watching him.

"I thought so," she said, as she clenched her hands involuntarily; "he is gone to the English colonel's."

Meanwhile Antonio da Belba rode on, with his cousin's question pertinaciously beating at his brain. "Do I love her?" he kept repeating to himself, till his horse dropped into a canter, and from a canter dwindled imperceptibly to a walk, without his being able to find any solution to the question.

"I wish Petronilla would leave me alone," he said to himself irritably. Yet there was a time when no word of Petronilla Delmonte's had vexed him; but now he confessed to himself he hated to hear her clear, ringing voice sharply uttering the name of the young stranger who filled his thoughts.

Eveline Macneil had only been in Corsica two months. Her father, a widower, was a colonel in the English army, and his regiment, or a portion of it, was here now to aid the Corsicans in that insurrection against the French which, as everyone knows, ended in defeat. Eveline, with her sunny brown hair, deep blue eyes, and piquant face, was a true type of Irish beauty; but, above all, the soft rose flush on her healthy cheek dazzled Antonio with its rare charm, for in Corsica the women are too brown or too pale.

Like most Corsicans of good family, Antonio da Belba had been educated in France; he spoke French, therefore, with perfect ease and fluency. Eveline, left motherless very young, had been brought up in a French convent, so the same language was, as it were, native to her tongue. Hence, when these two met, they found none of the usual difficulty of foreigners in their social intercourse, and they became friends at once.

Antonio and his cousin Petronilla were of the same age—twenty-four. They had known each other from infancy, and there had never been any talk of marriage or of love between them; nevertheless, when, at the age of seventeen, she was bestowed by her mother on the rich Marquis Delmonte, Antonio displayed a boyish ill-temper which greatly astonished his cousin. At seventeen a girl treats a

boy of her own age like a child or a plaything. The marquis was eight-and-twenty, handsome, bold, imperious, and Petronilla, in all the fearlessness of her innocence, accepted his hand gladly, anticipating a happy future.

Seven years had passed since then, and there was not a thought or feeling in the young wife's heart which had not undergone a change. The boy-cousin at whom she had laughed was a man now, and the handsome marquis whom she had adored, with his hard, restless, careworn looks, contrasted ill at thirty-five with the frank, fresh face of twenty-four. He had married for an heir, and as year after year went by without bringing the desired blessing, a strange, cruel hatred grew up in his heart for his young wife, and taunts, and harsh words, and cold neglect filled up the measure of her sorrow. But with the courage of a martyr she kept these things a secret, and to no one, not even Antonio, did she ever speak of her grief, or divulge the silent thoughts that lay hid in her vexed soul. Whether she loved her husband, or hated him, or pitied him none knew. Perhaps he was worthy of pity, for his was a nature distorted in childhood. His guardian, kinsman, and next heir had cruelly ill-used him in early life. It was not till the boy found himself at a French college that he began really to live and develop in strength and intellect; but an ineradicable mischief had been done to his character. Tyranny and cruelty had implanted in his nature a secret vindictiveness and concentrated power of hatred which he hid carefully beneath manners of genial frankness. Yet he might have outgrown this poison, he might still have become a good man; but at the turning-point in his existence his kinsman again stepped in and marred all.

The marquis was twenty years of age when he saw and loved a young girl of inferior station and fortune to his own. His uncle forbade his marriage, and calling on the parents of the girl to expostulate with them, he saw the daughter, and fell violently in love with her himself. He was verging on middle life; there were none of the obstacles to his marriage that hedge about the Hymen of the young among the Latin races; the fair Bianca must have waited many years for the marquis, and she had not the faith and courage that outlive difficulty and opposition. Enough, she jilted her lover to bestow her hand upon the man whom of all others he most hated. But by what falsehood and intrigue her consent was won, by what tyranny young Delmonte was made to stand powerless by, the outside world never knew. Perhaps cruelty to the boy makes the man a coward, and he may have feared his kinsman too much to venture on desperate measures, or perhaps he was indeed helpless before all the respectability of law, custom, and parental authority.

After this blow the young man quitted Corsica, and travelled both in Italy and France, returning, after an absence of seven or eight years, more French than Corsican. One solace met him on his arrival: his uncle's wife was childless, and he, morose and sickly, had



grown prematurely aged. Their château up in the hills rarely received a visitor, and report said the lonely Bianca made but a sad countess.

The marquis resolved to marry, and pour into the cup of his kinsman and his false love the gall and bitterness of seeing him happy in the gate, with his quiver full of children. He cast his eyes on the fair Petronilla da Belba and won her. Dazzled by his beauty, and pleased with his glossy French manners, the young girl married him, her heart filled with all the glowing illusions of youth. But as year after year rolled coldly on, they ruthlessly swept away these delusive fancies, and at the end of seven years what hope was left to the woman's barren life she alone knew.

The marquis had married for revenge, and it had not come to him. Childless like his uncle, he had not even, like him, the consolation of loving his wife. And this hated kinsman was still his heir. In all the island there was no man so reckless, so dissipated, so gay, and so gloomy as Giuseppe, Marquis Delmonte.

## CHAPTER II.

### IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

"ARE you going out riding?" cried Antonio as he met the colonel and his daughter, both on horseback, coming down the hill from the citadel. "May I come with you?"

But he turned his horse's head in their direction at once, without waiting for the hearty assent which the colonel instantly gave. The blush that covered Eveline's face on seeing him, and the joy that beat in his own heart ought now to have answered the question still whispering itself in his conscience; but self-deception is very blinding, and for a short time yet he denied his love, and sighed over the fancied blight in his existence that his cousin's marriage had made.

The party rode on gaily, turning to the interior, and gradually ascending the hills, and they had already ridden some miles when the colonel paused at the foot of a steep ascent.

"I think, Eveline, this must be the nearest way to the count's château," he said. "By-the-bye, Da Belba, you ought to know the road to the count's. Are we right in going up this hill?"

"Of what count are you speaking?" asked Antonio carelessly.

"The Count Delmonte di Sabiani. Eveline is going to spend a week or ten days with the countess. You know there is nothing French about the count; he is a thorough Corsican—we English are safe with him."

"Are you going there?" exclaimed Antonio in a vexed voice. "Then I fear I must leave you; my cousin Delmonte would never

forgive me for entering the house of his enemy ; near relations as they are, there is a sworn vendetta between those two."

"Your cousin is no patriot, we all know," answered the colonel coldly. "Doubtless it is equally disagreeable to him to see you with me. Addio, then, Signor Antonio."

The young man's face flushed red to the brow, while Eveline, bending her lustrous blue eyes on him, exclaimed sorrowfully :

"And shall I never see you all the time of my stay with Madame di Sabiani ?"

Her father, interrupting Antonio's attempt to speak, answered for him.

"Have you not heard him say, my dear, that he cannot venture to displease Monsieur le Marquis ?"

"It is not for the marquis," cried Antonio hotly ; "it is my cousin—it is Petronilla I do not like to vex."

Eveline's face at his words became suffused with crimson. She had heard something of his boyish attachment to his cousin, and there was a vague jealousy at work in her heart which the slightest word might kindle into flame. She turned her horse suddenly and cantered several paces up the hill.

"Are you coming, father ?" she said, in a clear voice. "Adieu, Monsieur da Belba," she added, dropping her tone to the coldest accent of politeness.

Antonio marked the change, and also that she had not said *Au revoir*, but *Adieu*. He spurred his horse, and in a moment reached her side.

"At least, I can accompany you to the gate of the château ?" he said.

But this proposition only irritated Eveline the more.

"There is no need, thank you," she answered coldly. "It would be a pity to risk offending Madame la Marquise by approaching even the gate of the obnoxious château. Farewell, monsieur."

She cantered sharply up the hill, the warm blood mantling her cheeks to a lovely crimson, and a gleam of Irish fire glancing in the blue lightning of her eye.

Antonio gazed after her wistfully, hesitated a moment, and then followed at full speed : but it was not so easy to recover the footing he had lost. Instead of cordiality he found civility ; instead of laughter and pleasant chat, silence or formal phrases of politeness, and, as the freezing cloud fell between them lower and lower, a strange tightness of the heart seized him, like a sharp pain that takes away breath and eyesight.

They had reached the gate at the end of the great avenue leading to the château, when Eveline turned towards him with a grave parting bow, uttering, however, not a word as she passed on, her father holding the gate open for her. The bare suspicion that Antonio cherished a love for his cousin shocked her. Flirtation with a

married woman was a thing too common in France and Italy for her to reject the idea as impossible, but this did not alter the contempt with which her honest Irish heart regarded it. So secretly she resolved to make Antonio's conduct now the test of her esteem for him. If he refused to follow them to the *château* she should know that Petronilla Delmonte held an undue influence over him, and she would never again vex her own heart with his shadow. This thought made her hold her head erect and keep her face averted, as, waiting for her father, she checked her horse a moment beneath the trees. Antonio, with his hand on the gate, gazed on the beautiful profile turned away from him, and felt he could not part with her thus. No thought of the Delmontes was in his mind as, passing the rubicon of his fate, he entered the avenue, letting the gate swing slowly behind him. Silently he joined Eveline, and rode by her side beneath the heavy shadow of the summer leaves; but though neither spoke, each understood the significance of this act, and each trembled with the tumultuous feelings that swelled their hearts.

The countess, a pale, fragile lady, was walking on the terrace of the old mansion. She came forward courteously to greet them, while in a moment her husband joined her, and Antonio found himself exchanging kindly civilities with both before he had time to reflect what line of conduct he should pursue.

"Is it possible you are the Signor da Belba?" said the lady sorrowfully. "I did not recognise you, it is so long since we have met. Are you come in friendship?" she added, with an anxious glance towards her husband.

Sadly confused, Antonio nevertheless stammered out a few civil words, in the midst of which the count came suddenly to his relief.

"You are welcome, Da Belba," he said. "This is not a time for private feuds, and there has never been ill-will between your family and mine. If your cousin marries my kinsman, and he quarrels with me without cause, I see no reason why that should set enmity between you and me. Your father and I were friends—I will be yours if you will."

He spoke so frankly, he held out his hand so cordially, that Antonio felt he could not churlishly refuse it. He had no right to seek a quarrel with a man at his own door, having ridden voluntarily thither unasked, so he took the proffered hand, and, unconscious of the look that passed between the colonel and the count, he stepped as a friend across the threshold of his cousin's deadliest enemy.

"He is gained now to our cause," said the count softly.

An assertion to which the colonel answered by a congratulatory nod, being in utter ignorance that in gaining England a friend he had most likely lost a daughter.

"Having once found your way to our poor *château*, Signor Antonio," said the pale Countess Bianca, when, after a slight reflection, her two male guests rose to depart, "you will, I trust, come to

see us again. The Signorina Macneil and I look to you to bring us news from Ajaccio."

Eveline did not venture to second this invitation in words, but as she held out her hand in that frank, cordial, English fashion which so astonishes the continental world, her eyes said plainly, "Will you come?" And in taking those slender fingers in his, Antonio felt he was making a promise to be a visitor beneath the roof of the Sabiani. As he relinquished the little hand, whose touch made him powerless, a momentary thought of his cousin in her pale, steadfast beauty struck him like a sharp reproach; but he flung it off hastily, comforting himself with the idea that he would see her on the morrow, and by a soothing explanation mollify any anger she might feel at his conduct.

On his ride home he no longer questioned himself if he loved Eveline. His question now was how he should tell her of his love, and how win her consent and her father's. Yet, still the remembrance of his cousin struck coldly at his heart, and in spite of all the arguments by which he strove to reassure himself, there ever remained a lurking something which told him he had this day struck a deadly blow at her peace. In vain he tried to analyse and understand this strange fancy; it eluded the grasp of all logic, yet remained fixed in his mind like a superstition in which there is no reason. Looking back on the past, he saw nothing to reproach himself with. True, he had once loved Petronilla, but so boyishly, so timidly, so hopelessly! No word of love had ever passed his lips, never had he offended her sisterly affection by a selfish complaint, and a year or two after her marriage there was nothing left of this boyish passion save a morbid fancy that in the tears and childish pain of his disappointment he had quenched all power of love in his heart. He knew better now, and his cheek flushed with joy as the face of Eveline flashed before his dreaming eyes.

"How thankful I am Petronilla never loved me!" he said to himself.

Then he fell to musing on the first years of his cousin's marriage, when the affection which she showed to her husband—never seeking in her wifely devotion to hide it or heeding the pain of her boy-cousin—had taught him to esteem her the more, while it ruthlessly plucked up by the roots the weak, silly love—he felt it to be that now—which he had nursed. Hence it was that they had grown to be like brother and sister, and, as he remembered tenderly their long-tried affection, he felt all a brother's pride in the spotless honour and virtue that crowned her like a golden aureole.

"I will give her all my confidence to-morrow," he said to himself.

"I will tell her that I love Eveline. She will advise me how to act—she will help me to gain this great happiness."

"Do you know you have been a most silent companion, Antonio?" said the colonel as he shook hands kindly with his young friend at the gate of the citadel.

Late that evening, after a long stroll by the seaside, Antonio was

startled on entering his room to see the figure of a woman seated by the window. He paused at the door a moment, unwilling to enter till the stranger had spoken, but she remained silent, thus forcing him to come forward. As he approached her the figure rose and turned towards him the pale, earnest face of the Marchesa Delmonte.

"Petronilla!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Has anything happened? Have you heard from Delmonte? Is he well?"

"My husband is well," answered Petronilla in a sad, low voice; "he will be home to-morrow."

"Then why are you here?" asked the amazed Antonio. "Are you ill yourself?"

"I am well," she said; but her tone was so feeble, so full of lassitude, that Antonio came towards her hurriedly.

"I am sure you are ill!" he exclaimed. "Let me take you home; old Ernestina shall go with us if you like. I know, Petronilla, that we are brother and sister, yet to the world we are only cousins, and you should not be here—so late, too."

"What does it matter?" she answered. "You speak truly; we are brother and sister."

She turned her face away from him for a moment, and then, throwing back her hood, showed it to him ghastly pale in the clear moonlight.

"You ask why I am here, Antonio. I answer you that Giuseppe comes home to-morrow."

"Well, and what then?" cried her perplexed cousin.

"Then I am come to say farewell to my brother, for after this evening I shall never speak again to him on earth."

"Petronilla," cried Antonio in a trembling voice, "you cannot know what you are saying!"

"I know too well she answered sadly. "Two hours ago I would not believe that Antonio could forsake his sister for ever, merely to look a few moments longer on the fair face of a stranger, but belief is forced on me now."

She unfolded a letter which lay crushed within her clenched hand, and by the full radiance of the Southern moon read aloud:—

"MADAME,—Your messenger has just arrived. The report which has reached you is correct: my husband and I had the pleasure of receiving your charming kinsman to-day with the English colonel and his daughter. It is also true that he has promised to visit us again.

"We are patriots, madame, and we welcome with joy every friend who joins our country's cause, even when he steps from the ranks of our enemies. Make no apology for your question; I am happy to be able to oblige the Signor da Belba's cousin, kept apart as we are by the enmity of our husbands. I had never hoped to have the pleasure of doing the Marchesa Delmonte a favour.

"Accept, madame, the assurance of my distinguished sentiments.

"BIANCA SYBILLA DELMONTE DI SABIANI."

Antonio's cheek turned pale as he listened to this cuttingly civil letter, yet he put a brave face on the matter.

"And why should this separate us?" he asked haughtily.

"I would not believe it," answered Petronilla dreamily, "when that insolent Englishman told me where you had been, so I demeaned myself—I lowered my pride in the dust—to write to that low-born woman the Countess Bianca; and the moment my messenger returned with this"—she tore the letter to shreds as she spoke—"I came hither to bid you farewell."

"But why farewell?" persisted Antonio angrily.

"Giuseppe comes home to-morrow," repeated Petronilla. Then seizing Antonio by the arm, while her large eyes dilated with some horrible fear which made her frame shrink and shiver, she added, in a clear, thrilling whisper—"You do not know, Antonio, how well my husband can *hate*. He will never let me see you again."

Antonio had thought, on seeing his cousin, that he could explain his visit to the château; that he could make her understand how it happened, and how impossible it was that he could act differently; but he found now there was no explanation to give, he had literally entered the gate without a single voice saying "Come!" He remained silent, in deep pain and vexation.

"Antonio," said Petronilla in desolate accents, "I understand it all. You love this English girl; and her father is so anxious to gain friends for his country that he will give her to you when you ask him. May God bless you and make you happy in this strange union! but think sometimes of your forsaken sister Petronilla."

She gathered the folds of her cloak about her and would have risen, but Antonio broke forth vehemently:

"And do you suppose I shall let Delmonte separate us thus? I will tell him to-morrow of this unintentional visit of mine to Sabiani; not that he has any right to dictate to me where I shall visit, but for your sake I shall not go again. Eveline will return in a few days; I will wait to see her till then; so take courage, Petronilla! we shall always be, as we are now, dear friends. Giuseppe will listen to reason."

His cousin did not heed these words, whose mistaken hope she knew too well.

"Promise me," she said, "that, happen what may, you will *never believe me* to be your enemy."

"You, Petronilla, my enemy!" exclaimed Antonio. "How can you deem it possible I should ever think so?"

"Nevertheless, promise me," said the unhappy woman, clinging to his arm with a despairing grasp, "that even if death comes between us you will still feel that I am your friend and true cousin."

"My poor Petronilla," said Antonio, bending over her kindly, "you are mad with grief; you know not what you are saying; but I promise you with all my heart."



"No, no; say what I said; repeat the words after me. You do not know Giuseppe—no one knows him but me."

She was so agitated, she seemed so forlorn and sorrow-stricken, that, to quiet her, Antonio repeated the promise as she had worded it. The moment he had spoken she stooped suddenly and kissed him.

"Farewell, Antonio!" she said in a broken voice, while her tears fell on his face. "Never, never again while we live shall kiss of mine touch your brow—never again shall we hear each other's voices in kindness! O God! it is too much—give me air or I shall die!"

She dashed open the large Italian window as she spoke, and sprang out into the garden.

"Do not follow me, Antonio," she said softly; "it is better for me to be alone. Remember, we are brother and sister till death. Farewell, farewell!"

In a moment she was lost to view among the trees, leaving her cousin bewildered, sorrowful, and unbelieving.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A REFUSAL.

ANTONIO and the marquis met the next day, after the hour of siesta. What passed between them none knew; but before the evening of the morrow it was hinted abroad all through Ajaccio and its neighbourhood that Antonio, sorely wounded in duel, lay in his own house in grievous suffering and danger.

An orphan almost from his birth, the Marchesa Delmonte and her mother were his nearest relatives. These came not to his bedside; and the English colonel, who had been his second, frightened at the young man's forlorn position, and in his secret heart taking old Ernestina the housekeeper for a witch, sent off a man on horseback to the Count di Sabiani with a letter imploring his aid and counsel.

"Bianca," said the count, with a furtive smile playing round his lips, "my kinsman Delmonte flings the young Antonio da Belba from his house and from his heart; we must take him to ours."

If there is one thing a Corsican can do well, even in these degenerate times, it is to *hate*; but in the days of our story a vendetta was like a rattlesnake—deadly.

Two hours after the receipt of the colonel's letter, the pale, quiet Bianca was seated by Antonio's bedside, while Eveline stood weeping silently with her face hidden on her father's shoulder.

And Petronilla? No, I cannot enter yet into the secrets of the Marquis Delmonte's household. This is a true story, and truth is a terrible fact to tell. It is a fearful fact that things are done every day by the vile, the cruel, the heartless, not too bad for them to do,

not too bad for their victims to suffer, but too bad for pen to touch on or sketch even in the faintest of word-pictures.

Now let us sweep all this scene away, and raise the curtain on our actors two years after the duel.

They were married, Eveline and Antonio—you have guessed that—and there is peace in the island once more. England has given up all claim to Corsica, France rules supreme, the tricolour floats from tower and ship, and Paoli is an exile destined to die on English soil, and find a grave among British heroes in the old Abbey.

The colonel, with a sorrowful heart, has left his beautiful daughter in the strange land, and has returned childless and alone to his duty with his regiment. But there is no sadness in Antonio's house, none in Eveline's heart, for a son is just born unto them, and they look down on the smiling face of the infant, and find no place in their joy for a wistful thought of the absent and lonely man. Thus ever in this world do the young displace the old—thus ever, in the full tide of fresh life, do they die out of memory, and lie neglected like wrecks of time till the great wave of death sweep them into eternity. It is the cruel and inexorable law of Nature to cherish the young and cast the aged carelessly away, even as the gardener plucks up ruthlessly the withered flowers of winter to plant in the fresh slips of spring. So we will not be hard on this young couple in their early joy, or deem them selfish if for a while the forsaken widower is forgotten.

Save in the street, to pass hurriedly by without greeting, Antonio and his cousin had never met since the evening she came to his house and bade him farewell. In a few days, when his new delight in his son had become a common household joy and the yearning affection of parental love had begun to twine tightly around his heart, he felt a natural longing that she should partake of his happiness, and he held many a long conversation with Eveline on the possibility of effecting a reconciliation between himself and the Delmontes.

"I would forgive Giuseppe my wound with all my heart," he said, if he would only let us be friends with my cousin. Poor Petronilla! She would love this little one, Eveline, as if he were her own."

"You are mistaken," answered Eveline earnestly; "depend on it she has no wish either to see or to love *my* child. You forget that she does not like me."

Antonio had only thought of his son as his, and he fancied that all that was his must be dear to Petronilla; for this reason he could not believe that she disliked his wife.

"She does not know you, Eveline," he replied; "if she did, you would soon be to her as a sister."

Eveline had her own ideas on this subject; but, unwilling to continue the argument, she only shook her head in answer, and she made no objection when her husband proposed to write a letter to his aunt, Petronilla's mother, begging her to grant him a return of

her affection, and entreating her to crown his happiness by becoming godmother to his little son.

This letter was duly written and sent, and for two days Antonio awaited the answer with great anxiety. It was brought by the Marquis Delmonte's servant, and it was easy to see, though the writing was Madame da Belba's, the words were his. They were a cold, cutting refusal, couched in one short sentence full of hatred and sarcasm.

"I have brought this on myself," said Antonio as he crushed the letter in his hand, "and even if I had not I could not resent it, as it comes from my aunt."

So the young man turned sorrowfully away from all thought of reconciliation, and, forsaken thus by his nearest of kin, it was natural he should the more firmly concentrate his affection on his wife and child.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"THY NUMBERS, JEALOUSY, TO NOUGHT WERE FIXED."

"MOTHER and child must have change of air," said the lean physician, as he stalked solemnly from Eveline's chamber and met Antonio in the long, cool corridor, filled with the scent of orange-blossom and of rose.

"Are they so ill?" asked the young husband anxiously.

"It is not that," observed the doctor thoughtfully, "but this southern clime tries sorely the health of the English; madame faints under the heat. Ajaccio *is* hot. You must take your wife into the country, Signor da Belba—you must take her to the hills."

This conversation took place about six months after the birth of the little Antonio, when Eveline, too weak in this warm clime to be a nurse, showed symptoms of an exhaustion and prostration of strength that alarmed her husband. The child suffered with the mother, and a cloud hung over Antonio's happiness which presaged sorrow and gloom.

"I know a house," said the doctor, stroking his chin thoughtfully, "that will suit you exactly. It lies high up on the slope of a hill. There is a wood behind it, and a great mountain to the right throws a gigantic shadow that deadens the noonday sun. It is the coolest place in the island. Take it, Da Belba."

"But how do you know it can be had?" asked Antonio.

"Well, I heard of it from your cousin, Madame Delmonte, and she said it was to be let."

"You heard of it from Petronilla?"

"Yes; she often asks me for news of you—though, I observe, not when her husband is by—but the other day he happened to come in

suddenly when we were talking of you, and as I did not choose to be disconcerted, I continued the subject, and, among other things, I remarked that your wife must go to the hills to renovate her health. Well, yesterday, calling in again to see the marchesa, who has some strange nervous disorder which baffles my skill, she said to me hurriedly, 'Tell my cousin that the Signor Morelli will let his house. It is a beautiful house—no one can be ill there.' I would have asked her more about it, but at this very moment the marquis entered the room, and the marchesa at the same instant was seized with one of those nervous attacks of which I speak. Santa Maria, I never saw such spasms! I was delighted——"

"Delighted!" interrupted Antonio, amazed.

"Why, yes, because—don't you perceive?—every time the servants send for me I arrive too late. Madame has been horrible, they say—madame has been stretched on the rack, but when I come, breathless with running, there's madame, white as marble, and placid as a Madonna, declaring in her softest tones, that there is nothing the matter—nothing."

"Poor Petronilla!" said Antonio sorrowfully.

"Ah!" ejaculated the lean physician, jerking himself into his hat with amazing energy, "you may well say that. There is something in her case, signor, that not all the doctors in Padua could understand. I am puzzled, I can tell you—mystified—that's the word—but I am going—to find—it out."

Enunciating these last few words with exceeding distinctness and slowness, the lean, keen face made a bow gravely and departed.

Antonio hastened immediately to make inquiries concerning the château among the hills. He found the Signor Morelli was a man well to do—a hirer of vineyards, a fabricator of wines, a merchant of good repute, with purse well lined. He received Antonio with a smiling face, and entered upon the business at once.

"I have never yet let my house," he said, "but to oblige a lady, and so beautiful a lady, I would do a great deal."

"Madame da Belba shall thank you herself when she is better," replied Antonio, "for this kindness."

The fat little wine-merchant bowed with a serene expression of surprise.

"I shall be delighted to see the Signora da Belba, but it was the signor's cousin, the lovely Marchesa Delmonte, who requested me as a favour to let you have my house for your sick wife and child."

A feeling of grateful agitation and pleasure stirred Antonio's heart as he heard this.

"Petronilla is still the same," he said to himself—"loving, tender, thoughtful, the best and kindest of sisters. It is only Delmonte's unforgiving temper that causes this estrangement; *her* heart is as affectionate towards me as ever." And with this thought tears half

rose to his eyes, and a prayer went up to Heaven silently for her recovery from the strange sickness afflicting her.

"It is the healthiest spot on all the island," continued the Signor Morelli, who had never ceased talking. "There are always cool breezes up there, even in August, and the water is delicious. The stream in the valley never runs dry. And then the oranges and grapes! There are no such vineyards in Corsica as mine. By-the-bye, you won't want the cellars, will you? Because in that case I scarcely see how I could oblige you. The cellars are very large, and I have a great store of wine there, which I positively can't remove."

"Keep your wine there," I entreat you," remarked Antonio politely. "I have no need of large cellars. You can lock them up if you please, only leave me a small one; I shall require no more."

"Oh! I can leave you two or three," said the merchant in his sleekest manner. "The cellars are enormous. I excavated them under the hill in order to have room for my wine. I make a kind of *dépôt* of this villa."

This little affair of the cellars finished, the bargain was soon struck, and Antonio became the Signor Morelli's tenant on very fair terms.

In a few days Antonio drove his wife to the spot, which did not belie the doctor's report, for in truth it was one of the loveliest in Corsica; and, after enjoying her admiration for some minutes, he told her he had hired the villa, and she might enter it when she pleased.

Delighted as a child, Eveline seemed to forget her weakness as she ran from room to room uttering exclamations of astonishment and pleasure at the lovely view seen from the windows.

"Ah! I shall soon get strong here," she cried, leaning her head on Antonio's shoulder. "How good and clever you are to find this pretty place for me and baby!"

"But it was not I who found it, Eveline; it was someone much handsomer and cleverer than I."

Eveline pouted her lip at this, and shook her sunny curls knowingly.

"I should like to see the person in Corsica who is cleverer and handsomer than you," she said. "I don't believe in him—there is no such person."

"Did I say *him*?" asked the flattered husband, patting the pretty cheek—a little paled now—that leaned on him so lovingly.

"Oh, it's a lady then!" There was a slight disappointment, even dread in the voice, but rallying immediately, Eveline added with a laugh: "Ah, I see whom you mean. It was old Ernestina, the clever old creature! I'll give her a new rosary to-morrow."

"Wrong!" cried Antonio; and delighted to see his wife so much better, he put his arm round her waist and jumped her lightly from the ground with a ringing laugh right joyous to hear.

"Wrong? Then it's Madame di Sabiani," said Eveline a little eagerly.

"Wrong again! wrong again!" laughed Antonio. "It's some one a hundred million times handsomer and cleverer than Bianca di Sabiani."

He had no sooner spoken than Eveline released herself from his clasp with sudden anger, and retreating to the window, she said coldly:

"There is no need for further guesses. I know now. It was your cousin, Madame Delmonte, who found you this house. I don't like it, and I will not live in it."

"Eveline!" exclaimed Antonio, too petrified with astonishment to say more.

Eveline tapped her foot impatiently on the floor, and looked at him with a considerable amount of Irish fire in her blue eyes.

"I wonder how she can dare have the impudence to interfere in our affairs," she said pettishly. "But I'll stop it all—I'll write and tell her husband. It is not likely he'll let her do us a *kindness* again."

The bitterness of her tone, the sarcasm of her words, the ill-nature and ungenerous feeling displayed in her speech, annoyed and grieved Antonio. For the first time he felt disappointed in his wife, even ashamed of her, hurt that her soul should be so mean. The poor young man had not the slightest idea to what depths of meanness jealousy can stoop, still less could he fathom that profound instinct of a mother which feels some evil coming upon her offspring even before the shadow of its approaching presence has dimmed a single ray upon her path.

"Eveline," cried Antonio warmly, "if you were to write to that ruffian Delmonte and say a word against my poor cousin, I should never forgive you."

"Why cannot she leave me and my child alone?" retorted Eveline angrily.

"Good Heaven; what has she done?" exclaimed Antonio with still greater heat. "She has shown you and your child a great kindness, she has risked her husband's anger for your and my sake, and you reward her by abuse. Poor Petronilla," he continued, and his voice softened to tenderness; "I was so glad when I heard of her solicitude for you; I felt so grateful to her; I knew then she still loved me."

At these words Eveline burst into tears and exclaimed bitterly that she was unhappy, very unhappy, and she feared the air of Corsica would never agree with her; perhaps she had better go home to Ireland.

The bewildered Antonio scarcely knew whether to soothe or to scold; but one look at Eveline's pale face, and the sight of her evident distress, decided him to forgive all, though he understood neither her anger nor her sorrow. But for all his amiable intentions there was a hot, vexed feeling in his heart as he lavished tender words



and caresses on her, and the young wife felt that, in spite of this seeming kindness, she had sunk in her husband's esteem.

"This I owe to Petronilla," she said to herself, and the tears welled into her eyes as she added one more item to her heap of bitterness.

Yet perhaps Antonio was even more vexed than she, for it hurt him to the quick that his beautiful little wife, the angel of his days, should descend from her high place in his esteem to play the part of a spoiled, spiteful child.

Their drive home was silent and sad, and though neither could be said to be sulking, each was conscious of having made a silent determination against the wishes of the other.

"I shall go into the house at once, Eveline," said Antonio, with a resolute, masterful, marital air, as his wife, weary and weak, sank upon a couch in her own room. "You look wretchedly ill, so does the little one, and Dr. di Santi said the sooner you were both on the mountains the better."

"The little one will never be better *there*," answered Eveline gloomily; "and if you force me into that house against my will, you shall see what will happen. If anything dreadful occurs, or I do something desperate, don't blame me. I have taken a hatred against the place, and I can't describe to you what I feel about it. I shudder at the thought of going thither, Antonio. I am determined I will not live there. I feel like *death*—like murder, when I think of it."

And the warm-tempered Irish girl, little considering what strong language she was using in her excitement, permitted the full blaze of her eyes to flash on her husband's face ere, running over to him, she clasped her arms about his neck, and fell down upon his shoulder, weeping. Her weak health rendered her little able to bear the fever of this unwonted dispute, and after a moment of surprise, anger, pity, Antonio felt her form grow heavy on his arm, and saw her sink back insensible. He had laid her on her bed, and did not leave her side till she had sunk to sleep. Then he went out to his favourite haunt on the sea-shore, and sat down on the rocks to ponder what course he should take. This was his first dispute with his wife, and, like all first quarrels, it took immense dimensions in his eyes, and frightened him. Secretly he wished to please Eveline by giving up the house at once; but there were many obstacles to this. He had passed his word to Signor Morelli, and even paid a certain sum towards repairs and embellishments which he thought would gratify Eveline. If he changed his mind now, he must lose this and at least a quarter's rent, if not more, for he could not offer Signor Morrelli a less compensation for the trouble he had given him. Now Antonio could no more afford to lose money than any one else can; so, unable to resolve on the sacrifice, he fretted and fumed, and threw pebbles into the sea, and wished his wife was more sensible, till the sun went down, leaving the waters like an ocean of fire, out of which the night and the stars grew gradually, as if born of that faded glory

Meanwhile, Eveline no sooner found herself alone than she called old Ernestina to her side, and asked for pen, ink, and paper. But when those mischievous inventions of human wit and malice were brought to her she hesitated. She had intended to carry out her threat of writing to Delmonte, but when she remembered Antonio's warning, when her instinct, drawing near the truth, shuddered on the vengeance she might bring on the marchesa, she gave up her resolve, and determined to write to Petronilla instead.

"Do you think you could take a note to the Marchesa Delmonte without her husband seeing you?" she asked of Ernestina.

That acute old domestic was quite insulted by the question. Could she take a note without a husband seeing it? Couldn't she take twenty, fifty notes with a hundred husbands standing by, and deliver them all to their destination without a single marital eye suspecting her? *Hadn't* she done it many a time in younger days? Santo Filippo! Santo Genario! and all the saints! what did her innocent little foreign mistress take her to be? A child, a pigeon, who let letters be cut from under its wing, or what? Thus reassured, Eveline wrote rapidly in French these few words:

"MADAME,—Your husband certainly cannot be aware of your *friendly* attempt to find a country residence for me and my sick child. Excuse me if I say I do not wish to be indebted to you for any kindness. All overtures hitherto for reconciliation have come from my husband, and they have been rejected so insolently by your mother and yourself that I cannot but feel any interference on your part in my affairs is simply an insult. If your feelings belie your conduct, and you still cherish an affection for Antonio, it cannot be pleasing to your husband, who hates him, neither is it pleasing to me; and I shall not fail to inform the Marquis Delmonte of your conduct, if you persist so indelicately in thrusting friendly offices on us, equally disagreeable to him and to me. At present, if I advise your keeping this letter secret, it is for your own sake, not for mine, although I confess frankly I am writing without Antonio's knowledge, as his affection for his aunt, your mother, will ever prevent his uttering a cruel word to you. Nevertheless, madame, the wounds he received from the Marquis Delmonte, and the enmity and insults he has accepted at your hands, render all kindly offices between you and me not only impossible, but incredible. I have no faith in any kind word and deed of yours. I believe they hide some deadly design. I am not deceived, Madame Delmonte; your husband hates my husband, but you hate *me*. Beware! lest in telling the marquis all I think, I gain one enemy less for myself and one more for you.

"It is not my intention to inhabit the Pavillon des Grottes. I prefer to select a residence for myself.

"EVELINE DA BELBA."

CHAPTER V.

HOW ERNESTINA PERFORMED HER MISSION.

"It wanted but this," said Petronilla, as, crushing this cutting, hasty, hot letter in her hand, she stood gazing at old Ernestina, with such a weary, sad look on her fair face, that the hard heart of that ancient domestic was somewhat touched with pity.

"Ah," she mumbled, "how times change! I remember when you and Master Antonio couldn't live apart a single day, and one gleam from your eye did him more good than holy water. Now you never see each other, or if you meet, you pass in the street like strangers; and your husband and he are sworn enemies. Well, well, all this comes of getting married. I was a wise woman in stopping single. If I quarrel, I can only quarrel with myself, and that's a quarrel that never lasts very long. If Master Antonio hadn't married——"

"Oh, cease, cease, Ernestina, I implore you!" cried Petronilla in a voice of pain.

"Especially with a foreigner," persisted the hard old lady; but a sharp cry from Petronilla stopped her.

"My husband is coming," she said, as she sank, deathly pale, into a seat.

His step echoed through the passage as she spoke; it came to the door, stopped, then passed on, and in another moment they saw his fierce, handsome, cowardly face glancing by the windows, as his horse took him rapidly away.

"Well," said Ernestina to herself, as she bent her hook nose over her rosary, "there's something here that savours of the diavolo himself, else why a woman should be so afraid of a man it's not in nature to tell. I never was afraid of two or three even, much less one!"

Meanwhile Petronilla, seated at a little table, was penning a reply to the fierce letter of the jealous Eveline. But even while she wrote she overwhémed Ernestina with questions.

Was the infant pretty?—did Antonio love it?—was it like him?—did he ever speak of her? And the Countess Bianca was godmother? Ah, once she had hoped that—— But here Petronilla stopped with a perceptible shudder.

"*O cielo!*" she murmured; "how thankful I am that I am not that little one's godmother!"

"Are you afraid its mother is a heretic?" asked Ernestina sharply. "You need not fear that. I see her say her prayers to the Holy Virgin every day. She is as pious as you or I."

"I am not pious," exclaimed Petronilla, with a sort of horror in her eyes. "I never dare to pray now. I have not been in a church for months."

"Holy Mother!" said Ernestina, crossing herself; "what evil eye is upon you?"

The old lady now hastened to depart from a house which impressed her superstitiously, and she even bound her chaplet of beads around Petronilla's letter ere she ventured to place it in her orthodox and church-going pocket. Then with an adieu far less cordial than her greeting she hurried away. But haunted by a fear of the evil eye, which she plainly felt looking at her through the small of her back, she turned out of the road to visit the shrine of a hideous Madonna, who, grim and ghastly in ill-carved, weather-beaten wood, looked down upon her worshippers from a small, compact, tight-fitting glass case, adorned with dirty paper flowers. Ernestina knelt before this image, laying the letter at its feet, while she murmured her prayers over her rosary with rapid voice and many diligent crossings of herself. Thus absorbed, she never heard the sound of a footfall, nor knew that the evil eye, unscared by the shrine, was now actually contemplating that portion of her frame so peculiarly liable to nervous impressions.

"Ernestina Coleoni," said the voice of the Marquis Delmonte, "I shall feel obliged if you will hand me that letter, written by my wife to your mistress."

There was no appeal from that eye and that voice, no ready fib that would serve her turn; so the hard old lady, unable to double or twist, unable to fight or to fly, surrendered, and delivered the letter with a trembling hand. With the same unmoved and graceful politeness with which he had spoken, the marquis read and returned it with a grim smile.

"Fools play into Lucifer's hands," he said; "but you, my Ernestina, are a clever woman. Your mistress, too, must be a remarkably wise little lady, well fitted to be the spouse of Antonio da Belba. He may not know what his wife is about, but I always find out what mine is doing, as you perceive," he added, raising his hat with the utmost politeness, and so piercing old Ernestina through and through with his dark eyes, that she declared she felt them like arrows; and never for many a long month afterwards did she get a headache without vowing the pain was caused by the fire and anguish planted in her brain by those evil eyes.

"The signora, your mistress, is welcome to the letter," continued the marquis, "and reassure her from me that this is the last kindness she will ever have to complain of from Petronilla Delmonte. For the rest, tell her to stay in Ajaccio and die: that will please me better than her going into the country to live."

With as profound a bow to the scared old lady as he would have given to a princess, the marquis turned back to the tree where he had tied his horse, and rode away with deliberate slowness. Not so poor old Ernestina: she hurried her beads and the letter into her pocket, and hastened on her road at a pace far less dignified than her

tormentor's. Without a word of boast she laid the letter before Eveline, and briefly recounted what had passed. Much frightened now at what she had done, the warm-tempered little Irish girl read Petronilla's missive with trembling lips:—

"I am much grieved, signora, that my husband's commands will not permit me to write to you as a cousin and sister. If I could speak from my heart, I would answer your cruel letter fully; as it is I am silent. But, signora, you have never had a brother, so perhaps if I spoke you would not understand. Antonio is your husband, you have known him twenty-seven months, but he has been my brother for nearly twenty-seven years, and a brother is better than a husband. He is a purer, tenderer, holier friend to a woman than a husband can ever be. Madame, I know Antonio better than you do, and I entreat you, if you wish to keep his love, never tell him of the hard, ungenerous words you have this day sent to me. Still, your letter contained one joy for me—you refuse to go to the pavilion on the mountain of grottoes. Persist in that refusal, madame, and I will thank you on my knees. I will pray for you, I will ask my mother to pray for you. I will bless you with my whole heart. O stay in Ajaccio! Do not believe what they may tell you of my recommending this house to Antonio—if I ever did so I lied. It was not *I*, Petronilla, his sister, who asked the Signor Morelli to let it to him, but that wretched woman, the Marchesa Delmonte, the wife of his enemy. O signora! do not take him into that evil-omened place; it bears a bad name; people grow mad, they say, who live in that air. No, never believe that *I* wish you to go thither; it would deprive me of my sole joy. Now I see Antonio sometimes, I watch him from the pavilion in my garden, and see him in his walks on the beach; *then* he would never gladden my eyes more. Do not take from me the only solace there is left in the bitterness of this enmity—stay in Ajaccio. I write this letter at the risk of my peace, perhaps of my life, but I care not: so you will heed my entreaties I should be content, I think, even to die. Ah! signora, if you knew how unhappy is the woman to whom you write so cruelly, you would not crush me with your hard words.

"Is your little infant better? I would say, 'Kiss him for me,' but I dare not—he is the Countess Bianca's godson.

"Adieu, madame. Bear in mind, whenever you hear of anything I have said or done, that I am your enemy's wife—

"PETRONILLA DELMONTE.

"I put my life in your hands by writing you this; you have only to send it my husband if you wish to kill me."

Through all this letter, terrified as she was when she read it, Eveline's jealous eyes saw only one thing—that Petronilla loved Antonio, and wished to keep him in Ajaccio that she might see him every day. Her hatred to the pavilion among the grottoes suddenly

vanished, and she only longed now to be there, where Petronilla's eyes might in vain ask for a sight of her husband. In the selfishness of that blind passion, jealousy, she did not heed the danger into which the Marchesa Delmonte had fallen through her cruel imprudence. To know that Antonio would grieve for any sorrow of hers was enough to harden Eveline's heart against her.

"Where have you been?" she asked with suppressed impatience as he flung himself wearily into a chair on his return home.

"I have been strolling on the beach," he answered carelessly.

"The Marquis Delmonte's house looks on the beach," said Eveline, and her eye fell as she spoke on the portfolio in which she had placed that strange, mournful letter, so significant in its meaning, could she but have read it with pure, unperverted vision.

"Yes, I know it," responded Antonio gloomily. "I go there hoping sometimes to catch a glimpse of Petronilla at her window; but I never, never see her. By-the-bye, Eveline, how ungracious I shall appear to my cousin if I give up this house on the mountain! The trouble she has taken to induce Morelli to let it to us looks like a first step towards reconciliation, and I should be grieved to reject or repulse it. There is nothing on earth I desire so much as peace between my relations and myself. The quarrel is all Delmonte's seeking; as for Petronilla, the solicitude she shows for your health and my boy's convinces me she still loves me. Do you really hate that house so much, Eveline?"

Eveline's cheek had crimsoned and paled alternately many times during his short speech, and now driven on by the blind, mistaken feelings at her heart, she took the course diametrically opposed to her happiness. If she had only shown Antonio the letter which bade him discriminate between his cousin and his enemy's wife, what a flood of anguish she would have spared herself and the unhappy marchesa! But she had resolved on a certain line of conduct, and was determined to carry it out. No matter what pain it cost her—concealment, deception, secrecy, these might come between her husband and herself, marring her fair married life; "but Petronilla," she said inwardly with passionate fever, "shall not see him every day. I will live with the wolves and foxes first. I will go to that house and exist in all the horror and gloom which I feel overshadowing me beneath its roof."

Thus the jealousy smothered and silent for two long years burst up now into a flame, which enabled the astute Marquis Delmonte to twist the warm-hearted Irish girl between his fingers with the ease and precision of his remarkably successful cue at billiards.

"Antonio," said Eveline with a perceptible shudder, "I have changed my mind about the House of the Grottoes. Take it if you will."

The young husband started from his chair, where he had sat in weary thought, and seizing her hand, thanked her eagerly. As his



kind, caressing words flowed over her pleased ear, her head sank upon his shoulder and they made up their first quarrel with kisses and tears. Still that hidden leaven of jealousy in her heart prevented the fulness of confession and love, and her cruel letter to Petronilla, with its sorrowful answer, remained a secret to Antonio.

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"You have obeyed me better in disobedience than obedience, madame," said the Marquis Delmonte, as creeping stealthily behind his wife he suddenly gripped her by the shoulder.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Petronilla, turning her beautiful face towards him in an agony of fear.

"I mean that the letter you have dared to write to Da Belba's wife will induce her to go to the grotto!"

Oh, what an anguish of terror looked out upon him from her wild eyes! What words of pain and horror fell from her blanched lips!

"You see it is useless to disobey me," sneered the marquis coolly. "You evade my commands, or you daringly disobey them, yet I gain my purpose all the same."

"Not this last!" cried Petronilla in accents that rang through the ear like a shriek for pity. "You cannot mean it! She shall not go to that house!"

"She will go, and all will happen precisely as I desire," responded the marquis with increased coolness. "Give me her letter to you. I want to read it. I like to peruse a character thoroughly."

With a trembling hand, and an eye that quailed beneath her husband's, Petronilla gave it, and then sank down by the table with her face hidden on her arms.

"The little idiot is jealous as fire," said the marquis with an expression of cold pleasure; "and she threatens to tell me of *you*, as if I were ignorant of any of *your* thoughts and feelings, Madame la Marchesa. Why, I could put my finger upon the very day and hour when you first despised that broken idol, your husband, and threw down your beating, passionate heart at the unheeding feet of Antonio da Belba."

There was no reply save for the low, wailing sob that burst from the unhappy woman like a cry wrung from one who despairs of compassion or help.

"And do you think I have not hated that man ever since I saw and despised your weakness?" continued the marquis in tones of concentrated malice. "I tell you I was never more fiercely glad in my life than when he broke bread with my accursed uncle, and so gave me a pretence for hissing out my loathing in his ear; and *you*"—here his strong fingers grasped her fair arm with cruel force—"dare to disobey me again, and all Corsica shall ring with my vengeance. I let the letter pass now because your miserable letter has accomplished my purpose more surely than any plan of mine could have done."

"No, no!" murmured the marchesa, lifting her pale face from her arms; "she will listen to my entreaty—she will not go to that horrible place. O God, grant this!"

"She will go all the more for your entreaty," thundered the marquis as his ire rose hotly to his brow.

"Then I will write to Antonio," said the marchesa in a low voice, "and warn him of his danger."

Words fail to tell the effect of her speech upon the marquis. His pale face grew livid with anger, his eyes literally blazed in their fury; yet he spoke in the calm tone of one who knows his power, and can make his victim feel it when he chooses.

"That is twice you have braved me to-day," he said. "You have first tried secretly to balk me of my vengeance, and now you dare me to my face. Recollect that for every such word as this of yours I will torture Antonio da Belba's heart to the core. If you think to spare him one pang even by dying for him, you deceive yourself, and your death shall be in vain."

He paced the room for a moment or two in that outward calm in which rage at a white heat sometimes shapes itself, and then with slow steps he approached his wife, and shook her by the arm. She raised her white face with a look of pitiable fear, and clasped her hands imploringly; but not a single word fell from her lips as she stood before him, cowering at his anger.

"Madame Delmonte," he said with a smile, "you know I am a philosopher, a man of science—a dabbler in chemistry, in electricity, a searcher into the hidden mysteries of Nature. I invite you to my laboratory to witness some of my experiments."

His words seemed to transform the marchesa from a statue into some writhing form of anguish. She fell at his feet, her eyes dilated by fear, her hands clasping his knees, her lips parted.

"Giuseppe, Giuseppe," she cried, "have mercy! Do not torture me any more. I will obey you. O God, save me!"

"There is nothing can save you," said the marquis, as taking her up in his strong arms he bore her from the room.

At midnight the lean Dr. di Santi was called to the bedside of the Marchesa Delmonte, but, though his keen face and searching eyes looked down upon her pallid countenance, silent, acute, observing, he was baffled, and could only wait and watch, like the lynx that he was.

A few days afterwards the marquis drew his horse aside on a steep hill, to let a *cortège* pass by of servants and household goods, then with an ominous smile on his lips he watched them enter the portico of a pretty bright villa that rested coldly beneath the shadow of a green mountain.

"Fools!" he murmured to himself. "How blindly they have fallen into my net!"

*(To be continued.)*

ENGLISH RISPETTI.

THE FOXGLOVE.

I.

QUEEN of our wildflowers, tall and nobly crowned,  
Thou risest on the eye with sweet surprise,  
There in that crescent on the terraced ground,  
As on a throne to catch the waiting eyes.  
And eyes wait on thee; for a fairies' flower  
Art thou indeed, from which they drew a power—  
A magic gift for fairy hands to show,  
As in the moonlight they tripped to and fro.

II.

THE FAIRIES' DUES.

A perfect floral obelisk art thou.  
For tier on tier ascends thy beauty rare,  
Till at the last, as on a royal brow,  
The crown is set of beauty yet more fair.  
Fades all below to fruitful seeds, and rise  
The glories higher to enchant all eyes.  
Fair flower, the magic of thy purple hues  
But makes thee worthy of the fairies' dues.

CONVOLVULUS.

Flowers of a day, that have your birth at morn  
And die at eve, yet bear a mission true—  
To brighten all the hedgerows and adorn  
The woodlands with your blossoms ever new :  
Short lives are yours, yet fragrant for the day  
In which ye bear a sweet and hopeful sway.  
I love to hear your trumpets sweetly blow  
Along the roadways wheresoe'er I go.

FORGET-ME-NOTS.

Like eyes of angels, looking on thro' tears,  
Thou lookest forth from brookside softly fair.  
Full faith is thine and constant, with no fears ;  
The messages of love are thine to bear.  
*Forget-me-not!* Love's fond petition filed  
In thee, dear flower, and difference reconciled ;  
Friendship's fair offering indeed thou art—  
The secret language of the heart to heart.

A. H. JAPP, LL.D.

## MY EARLIEST REMINISCENCES OF ROYALTY.

LIVING at Kensington, close to the old red-brick palace in which the Queen was born, I cannot but remember the first time I saw her on her sixteenth birthday, when, as Princess Victoria, she was going to what, I suppose, was her first public function. She was to be presented to her uncle, William IV., and we had tickets given us to see her start for St. James's.

I was myself very young then, and it made a great impression on me. We stood in a little crowd in an entrance-hall of the palace, and saw the carriages arrive. The first one was that of the Duchess of Northumberland, the governess of the Princess. Of her I only remember this—that she had a wonderful *rivière* of fine diamonds festooned round her waist. On her arrival there was handed in a basket of beautiful hot-house flowers for her illustrious pupil. Then arrived the Princess's half-brothers; and after a very little delay, they came down the flight of stairs leading into the hall, and the Princess with them. She was a fair, pretty young girl, evidently much excited by what was before her. She was so young that in her dress some of the details then usually observed were omitted. I forget if she wore a train. If so, it was of some soft gauze-like material, and if she held it over her arm, it did not show to us onlookers. She wore no feathers, and only in her fair-haired side-curls combs with diamond sprays on the top of them. Her dress was white satin embroidered with gold, and she had no veil or lappets.

We were amused to see the Princess's eagerness to start. Every carriage that drew up to the open door she made a movement to get into, and it was only when the last one came that she and the Duchess of Kent entered it.

Little did we then think how soon the Princess would be called to the throne; but we all felt the warmest interest in both the young girl and her illustrious mother.

On that day the uncle of the Princess gave her as a birthday present a grand piano that I saw afterwards in the private apartments at Windsor Castle, when I heard the gorgeous housekeeper who showed us over them tell how the late King had given it. I was sternly rebuked for venturing to ask if Her Majesty played much on it, which I thought a very innocent question, but was told it was not to be answered; and I felt proportionately abashed to have committed such an indiscretion.

I did not see the Queen again until the day of the Coronation, when I watched her go to the Abbey and return from it after the ceremony. We were in some seats at the end of Richmond Terrace,

Parliament Street. We had all been interested about the regalia, and had seen at the jeweller's who reset it the crown to be worn. It is now in the jewel-room of the Tower. It had been made smaller and less heavy for the young head that was to wear it, but my impression is that it now weighs three pounds.

I remember how pale and subdued the Queen looked as she drove slowly past us, her seat being evidently a raised one, and the carriage fitted with so much glass that all should see her well. On coming back from the Abbey, Her Majesty was much flushed; and it was plain, by the difficulty of bowing, how heavy the crown was, and how trying to fittingly respond to the enthusiastic welcomes of the crowds. She held the sceptre in her right hand, and the orb in the left, and looked an ideal queen. Indeed, I am glad to remember these old days, and, as old people do, remember them more vividly than yesterday.

I saw the Queen one day in a little informal circumstance that was most charming.

It was at the end of the Crimean War, and at the time of the state visit of the Emperor and Empress of the French. They had been to a great *fête* at the Crystal Palace, at Sydenham, where there had been a great display of the fountains and waterworks, and now were coming back to town. At the Piccadilly corner of Park Lane, the house No. 1, Park Lane, had then a little iron gate at the bottom of the few steps up to the front door. Opposite it was the entrance to the house where the old Duchess of Gloucester was living, and there the Royal party were calling when I came up. I asked a policeman why there was a little crowd, and he told me, adding, "Go inside this little gate, and you will see them come out." So up the steps we went and waited.

In a few minutes the carriage came out of the *porte-cochère*, and, as it was a very steep ascent to the level of the street, came slowly. The Queen and Empress sat facing Napoleon, who was alone, Prince Albert being absent. In the hand of the Empress was a little roll of paper of some two or three sheets, and she handed them to the Queen, and both ladies laughed merrily over them. The Emperor evidently asked to see them too; and they were handed across to him, and even he relaxed into a smile. There had been a very successful bazaar in aid of the widows and orphans of those who had fallen in the Crimea, and in it many contributions from the Royal Family that sold well—autographs by the Queen and the Prince, and water-colour drawings by the Princess-Royal. The old Duchess of Gloucester had also sent some pencil drawings—pastoral scenes with wonderful shepherds and sheep—in a somewhat archaic style. By the look of the papers, and also by the mirth they excited, I did not doubt the Duchess had handed over to the Empress those failures not judged good enough to offer to the bazaar.

It all passed very quickly, for directly the carriage turned into Piccadilly the impenetrable look came back on Louis Napoleon's

inscrutable face, and the stereotyped bows and smiles of his companions were resumed.

Talking of that *fête* at the Crystal Palace, the engineer of the water-works there, Mr. Wentworth Shields, once said to me, when I was telling him of my sight of the Royal people, what a difficult and trying time he had gone through on that occasion.

There were then, beside the many and elaborate fountains, a series of rapids down to the level of the gardens. They were a set of shallow steps that made a succession of cascades, and are now done away with, and of course demanded a great supply of water. In the course of the morning a great tank on which much depended burst, and the poor engineer was in an agony what to do. So he sent a message asking for all the men that could be spared from the gardens to come and pump up a further supply, and at the same time wrote a note to Sir Joseph Paxton, telling of the accident, and saying, "Keep them as long as ever you can seeing the Palace and at luncheon, and I will do the best I can on my part." And so the water display went off later than had been intended, and with a less abundant supply. The visitors knew and suspected nothing, and even with its marred proportions it was beautiful.

Once I was spectator of a little episode that showed how the laws of etiquette bind the most kindly of royal personages.

This time it was the widowed Queen Adelaide, who was at the opera hearing Jenny Lind, about whom everyone in those days was much excited. The Queen dropped her bouquet from the front of her box. It fell into the wide bell-shaped glass shade of the gaslight under the box, and of course the paper round it caught fire. A gentleman in the next box to Her Majesty stooped forward and tried to save it. It was quite a perilous effort on his part, and I saw how anxious the ladies with him were, trying to hold him back.

We all watched eagerly the salvage of the nosegay, and at last he succeeded in getting it, blew out the flame, wrapped his handkerchief round the burned stalks, and then indiscreetly offered it to Queen Adelaide, who had been watching it all with much interest. The Queen, however, drew back without accepting it from him, and he, apparently vexed at having afforded between the acts such a spectacle to us all, and taken so much trouble in vain, so far forgot himself as to fling the burned bouquet to the furthest end of the pit, where some spectator without doubt carried home the Queen's flowers. I do not for a minute think the Queen could have taken in her hand such a damaged article; but the annoyance the rescuer had not the art to conceal was as patent to us all as anything we saw on the stage that night, even with the Swedish Nightingale in the *Somnambula*. And now the sixty long years of this wonderful reign have passed away, and I am still here to join in the world-wide thanksgiving, and sing with heart and voice, "God save the Queen!"

M. I. PLARR.



## THE VALLEY OF THE RHONE.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "IN LOTUS LAND,"  
"THE ROMANCE OF SPAIN," ETC., ETC.



IT was a long drive back from the Pont du Gard and the wonderful aqueduct, and the exquisite old-world Château. The latter bore traces of many ages and periods, and the earliest could not have been later than the fourteenth century. The glimpse we had obtained of this remote paradise was not sufficient. A whole summer might well be spent here in dreams and a *dolce-far-niente* existence; lying on the banks of the river; contemplating the outlines of that rare Roman monument; watching the reflections of earth and sky upon the placid surface of the water;

wandering about the woods and grounds of the Château, making friends with its owner and growing familiar with all the lovely haunts indoors and out. What an ideal experience it would be.

The influence followed us, but we put the longing away as the strong little horse trotted over the long, straight, prosy white road leading to Nîmes, with the tame country on either side. In due time the town came into view, and we soon after drew up at the hotel, ready for a late *déjeuner* and the inevitable battle of flies.

The previous night there had been a representation at the theatre: an opera: and of all operas, Meyerbeer's dramatic *Huguenots*, taxing the highest histrionic powers. We rashly took seats on hearing that the company was excellent, and never will the agony of that evening be forgotten. Every actor was exactly opposed to his or her part; not one of them sang in tune; the playing was a burlesque: now screaming and tearing about the stage as though the actors had just escaped from Charenton: now an occasional pause and dead silence, as if stage fright had suddenly seized them all, or loss of memory. Marguerite de Valois occasionally dropped her crown, and picked it up and put it on again without being in the least disconcerted; and when Valentine tore across the stage and threw up her arms to prevent the exit of Raoul, and too vigorously backed against

the partition, it gave way and let her through like a perpendicular trap-door. Another time she came on the stage on the wrong side, disappeared, ran round, and with perfect sangfroid and a charming smile reappeared on the right.

These little incidents in no way disturbed the audience, who accepted them as the comic elements of a serious tragedy, and thought them very amusing. It lightened the gloom. And then such an audience! The stalls were given up to riff-raff; the "select" company sat above. The heat of the house was overpowering; the odour of garlic and an unwashed multitude ascending from below soon made the house intolerable. Long before the end we gave up the struggle and left with a racking headache, more knocked up with the ordeal than we should have thought possible. But how vividly and painfully it brought back the happy experiences of days long past. "A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things"—the words seemed to haunt us as we passed through the silent streets. Days when Titiens in all her glory took the part of Valentine and played and sang it as it had never been played and sung before and never will be again in this world: and they who can remember her (it is not so many years ago) will say it is not too much to assert this. Those were indeed the days of "Grand opera," and they seem to have passed away for ever. To all who appreciated the perfection of that past, the present is very hopeless. But this is a digression.

On leaving the theatre we thought ourselves fatally poisoned; but restless feverish hours gave place at last to sleep—nature's sweet restorer. The long drive the next day, the Pont du Gard, the aqueduct, the old château, completed the cure. Never a more wholesome, more delightful medicine.

After that drive, déjeuner and guerre à l'outrance with the flies, our moments in Nîmes were numbered. We had just time for a last fond look at the wonderful Colosseum, the Roman Bath and Temple of Diana—that matchless ensemble of the Jardin Public—and then away to "green fields and pastures new."

This, however, is a mere figure of speech. Our green fields were represented by houses: all the ancient and historic and splendid monuments of Arles: where nothing resembling green fields is to be seen closer than the tall straight trees of the "Street of Tombs," and the spreading branches of the boulevards.

It was a short journey, and the only town of importance we passed on the road was Tarascon, which lies picturesquely opposite Beaucaire on the left bank of the Rhone. But we did not see even the ghost of the monster Tarasque, from which the town is supposed to derive its name. A terrible monster, says tradition, conquered at last by St. Martha who landed here with Mary Magdalene: her only weapon the cross, with which she tamed the monster and attached him to her girdle, so that it meekly followed her about.

St. Martha is accordingly the patron saint of the town, and her tomb is in the church called after her name: a fine fourteenth century building with a Romanesque portal. From the railway we thought the place looked well worth a short visit, if only for the said church and picturesque château; but we could not disturb our plans; and when the train rolled over the fine viaduct, we rolled with it.

Approaching Nîmes we were struck by the appearance of the distant ruins of Mont Major crowning a height. In fact the whole view was impressive, until the town shut it out, as the train steamed into the station.

As usual, the first impression was disappointing. The lumbering omnibus rattled over cobble stones in the narrowest, most uninteresting of streets. Arles, the most ancient town of Southern France has, like all other towns, been renovated, renewed and rebuilt in its most habitable parts until no vestige of antiquity remains in them, and it was through these thoroughfares that the crazy omnibus took its way.

Arrived at the Hôtel du Forum, madame, a very substantial lady indeed, met us with empressement: and if bows and empressement meant anything, we had fallen in clover. We were soon disillusioned. Madame sat in her bureau dispensing fine words with the air of a duchess, and calmly making out her accounts; but the *salle à manger* was the worst on record; the fare, coarse and uneatable, was so abominably dressed, that we had daily to repair exhausted nature by sundry visits to the pastrycook's. There at least was no Barmecide feast; the condiments were delicious; whether they were wholesome was another matter. We took the risk.

The Hôtel du Forum was about the most uncomfortable in existence; so much so that Arles becomes impossible to stay in, nor would we ever stay there again. Happily in many surrounding places from which Arles may be visited comfort is to be found. The hotel was badly organised, or rather disorganised in every way. The servants were rough and unready, though madame, with all her faults was suavity itself. Her servants made up for it by their extreme rudeness. In vain we tried to win them over by gentle arts. Only on the last morning did they put on a slight comeliness of manner—expecting a *pourboire*. But for once we were stern and determined and gave them nothing: and if maledictions did not follow our omnibus, the expression of their faces sadly belied their thoughts.

Apart from the discomforts of the hotel, what charms does Arles not possess! Like Nîmes, it has wonderful Roman antiquities; but more than Nîmes, it has a most interesting church, whose west portal and cloisters alone would repay a visit to the town.

The origin of Arles is doubtful, but in days long gone by it played an important part in the world. Under Julius Cæsar it was a rival of Marseilles, for in those days the sea was much nearer to Arles than it is now. In 2000 years it has receded a distance of twenty-

eight miles, and what was once a flourishing sea-port is now an inland town.

It must have been a very splendid place when Cæsar ruled. The Rhone empties itself here into the blue waters of the Mediterranean: the rocks of Mont Major, now high and dry and far off from the restless waves, formed a magnificent and impregnable island: the surrounding plains were covered with the waters of the deep deep sea, blue as the heavens, and, on occasion, calm and placid as an infant's sleep, beautiful as a dream. But the ages have rolled on and the sea has taken its course, and now it is only to be seen from some rocky height, shimmering far away in the sunshine.

Yet Arles still has water on which to find its reflections. The Rhone runs past in all its splendour and dignity, a wide, incomparable river. Portions of the old Roman quays still remain, to show one the greatness that once was: and from these quays you obtain fine views of old Roman houses and mediæval monuments that carry you back in spirit to the days when surely the skies, with all their perpetual youth, were younger than they are now.

A modern and unsightly iron bridge spans the river, uniting Arles with its quaint suburb of Trinquetaille; and if you have posted yourself up in the history of the province, you will know that in the very place of this modern erection was a gem of an old bridge that formed part of the famous Via Aurelian, a high road that, extending from Rome to Cadiz, took Arlate on its way. Great days they were, and Arlate or Arles was the flourishing capital of its small but mighty kingdom.

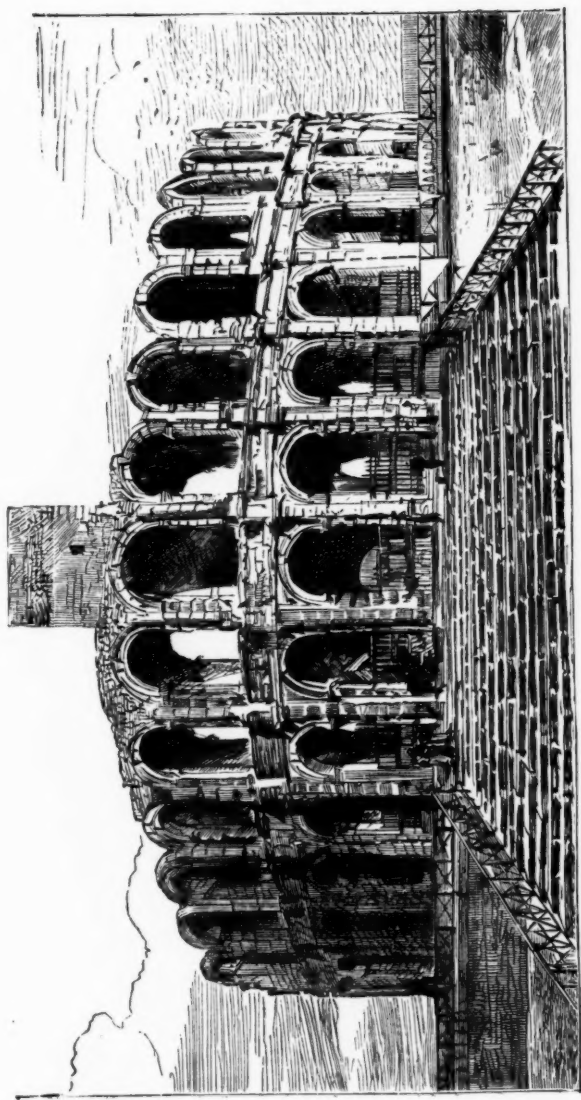
For all belonging to Rome, and all connected with Rome, was mighty. Here Constantine was often wont to come, and his mother, to whom he owed so much, was no doubt often with him; and here Trophimus, St. Paul's disciple preached Christianity, just as he preached it elsewhere. Any follower of St. Paul, greatest of men, should have made untold converts, for surely his mantle fell upon his disciples with mesmeric influence.

Following the picturesque quays you see fragments of a Roman bridge on either bank, but the great centre is no more. You wonder whether time, or wilful destruction, or some untoward and amazing torrent is answerable for the gap; but remembering how the Romans built, one of the three alternatives may surely be dismissed. The Romans built for time, and time has only beautified their work.

On the north and east sides of the town you still see the Roman ramparts, below which the tree-lined boulevards of modern days have been placed.

It is within these boulevards that the nucleus of the town exists; all that is modern; tortuous, narrow, ill-paved streets that make walking a pilgrimage; streets not too savoury; not too well kept; unhealthy; gloomy and depressing by day, badly lighted by night.

But Arles can afford this, for the sake of the gems it possesses;



AMPHITHEATRE.

the wonderful Roman remains that come upon one with such astonishing abruptness and surprise. You turn the corner of a narrow, crooked street, and suddenly there breaks upon you the startling view of the magnificent amphitheatre. Before turning that corner you were in all the prosaic element of the nineteenth century. In the twinkling of an eye you are transported to the very beginning of the Christian era.

This is the largest amphitheatre in France, and so far the most famous, but not so perfectly preserved as that of Nîmes. It rises gigantically against the blue sky, a building 500 yards round, with two storeys of sixty arches, the lower Doric, the upper Corinthian. There is a tower at three of the four points of the compass, but the coping stone has crumbled away, giving the building the picturesque appearance of a semi-ruin.

Yet it is no ruin, and may defy the ages to come. Enormous blocks of stone piled one upon the other are kept together without cement by the strength of their own weight and by splendour of construction. There are five massive corridors, and in the days of past glory forty-three tiers of seats made it possible for 25,000 to 30,000 spectators to view the games and bull-fights.

The three towers date from the eighth century and are probably Saracenic. These do not add to the beauty of the building and were used solely as watch-towers in the days when, like that of Nîmes, the amphitheatre of Arles had been turned into a gigantic fortress: a fate that also overtook Vespasian's Colosseum at Rome.

From the highest tower, you obtain a magnificent view of the town; of the country beyond; the far-off Alpine hills, the famous plains of the Crau; through which the Rhone takes its majestic course, upwards to Beaucaire and Tarascon: downwards to Marseilles and the Mediterranean.

These wonderful plains cover a vast area of 75 square miles, and are bounded by the Rhone on the west, by the Alpines on the north, by far-reaching, reflecting lagoons on the east, and by the far-off Mediterranean on the south. It is covered with shingle, said to be brought by the Rhone from the Alpine glaciers. In remote days, when Arles was a seaport it was a bay of the Mediterranean, into which the lovely little Durance flowed. The Durance remains to this day, and a very interesting excursion may be made into the country through which it takes its course.

So on a sunny day it is a gorgeous glowing view that one sees from the Saracenic towers of Arles. The broad river catching the sunbeams, looks here and there like a sheet of molten gold, hurrying towards the great blue sea in which to yield up its life.

Looking into the interior of the amphitheatre from the tower, it appears much more of a ruin than when gazing upon it from the exterior, with its massive blocks of stone and perfect Doric and Corinthian arches. But the ruin is more in appearance than in



fact. Here Sunday after Sunday, in the season, an immense crowd assembles and the bull-fight takes place: a fairly harmless affair, a somewhat childish amusement. No one is killed, and even the poor bull is allowed to escape—that he may fight another day. Now and then there is a moment's seeming jeopardy. A foot slips: the bull apparently has it all his own way, and prepares himself for a game of pitch and toss. The men of Arles turn pale, the fair women of Arles shriek gently and hide their faces; here and there one more delicate and sensitive swoons away into unconsciousness—we saw and heard them do it.

But the danger passes; there never was any real danger at all; the bull's attention is directed to another channel, by a red rag or an artful prod from behind, and the prostrate victim jumps up and runs away. The men recover their complexion, the women unbury their faces, the sensitive swooners by some occult instinct know the danger is over, and come back to life. There may be a little coquetry and affectation in all this, after the manner of fair women, but the play is natural and well acted, and far more interesting than that other senseless play in the arena.

Fair women? They are indeed fair women. We had long heard of the beauty of the *Arlésiennes*, but our imagination fell short of the truth. We never anticipated such a galaxy of beauty—beauty of a noble and splendid type. They are said to have retained the old Roman type of the early centuries, and apparently it is so. In no other way can one explain the phenomenon—for it is nothing less than a wonder.

Their forms are magnificent; they hold themselves like queens, walk like queens; their heads are set upon their shoulders as though they were mistresses of the world. Their faces are perfect, some resembling the Grecian, others the Roman type. Their eyes are soft and beautiful, their complexions clear and full of delicate physical health; their features are well formed, and the parted lips often reveal perfect sets of teeth.

In a word, never had we seen at one time such an assemblage of fair women.

With it all there was a distinct refinement of gesture and movement, of voice, feature and expression. And yet very many of them belonged to the humbler ranks of life; in spite of their patrician appearance—the proud patrician beauty of Rome—they were far removed from those of gentle birth and breeding. All they possessed of beauty, grace and refinement was in spite of themselves, inborn, the inheritance of the ages. Thus it was innate, and sat upon them so unconsciously that the charm was heightened.

To this was added another great charm: the charm of taste in dress; a costume infinitely becoming; rich in its way; devoid of angles. They were clothed in the softest and most harmonious of colours; delicate shades one looks for in vain elsewhere. Their

gowns fell in soft and graceful folds, draping, not concealing their admirable figures. Some wore small shawls over the shoulders; plain, or richly embroidered, occasionally of drooping lace. Their bodices were often also richly embroidered; or a covering of white net half concealed the whiteness of the beautiful shoulders. Some wore no caps, and their well-poised heads were adorned with coronets of hair that would have graced a Drawing-room at the Court of St. James's. Others wore a sort of twisted ribbon at the back of the head, very becoming and artistic. All the modern horrors of hats with ungainly feathers, erect and waving like the plumes of a hearse—of such abominations the Arlésiennes know nothing. Long may it be so.

One strange thing we noticed: an apparent want of sympathy and *rapprochement* between men and women. The women walked and grouped by themselves, the men did likewise. There might almost have been antipathy between the sexes. This would have seemed strange and incomprehensible, but that nature herself had perhaps done something to bring about the catastrophe. For the men were as ugly, and plebeian, and ungainly, and unintelligent-looking as the women were the exact opposite in all ways. The comparison was quite painful—one so pitied these angelic creatures mated to men of the lowest order of creation: a violent contrast, an incongruous condition of things.

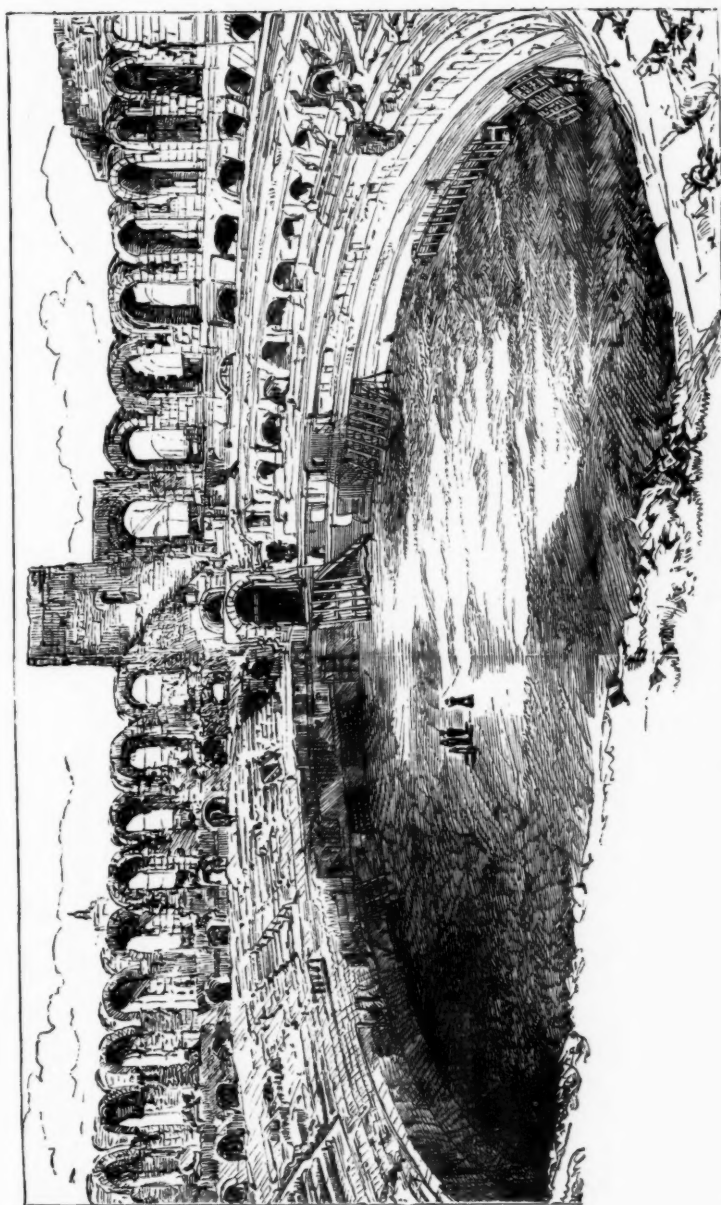
The unceasing marvel was how such men could be the brothers, sons, husbands and fathers of this exceptional female race. It seemed utterly impossible, yet has existed for centuries, and apparently may go on for ever.

We watched them narrowly one sunny afternoon in the seats and corridors of the arena. The refinement of the building, its antiquity and splendid outlines formed the exact setting for these queenly women. The men were beneath notice: worthy of the barbarous childish sport going on below. The women walked to and fro in the corridors, or stood in groups; but whether walking or standing, beauty and gracefulness distinguished them.

It was to see this wonderful sight—not to be seen away from Arles—that we had entered the lion's den—or, in other words, the bull-ring. To what was going on in the arena, we gave no heed, cast never a glance. There was far too much artistic feasting for the eyes round about, to give one thought to the play.

The susceptible H. C. who had never seen a sham bull-fight, much less a real one, was torn by conflicting emotions. He was as a man divided, endeavouring to keep one eye fixed on the arena, the other on the houris in his immediate neighbourhood. The result was not altogether satisfactory, and when all was over he felt that he had missed his mark, grasped the shadow and let go the substance.

We had left him to himself, and whenever the completed circle brought us back to his point, it was to note a harassed expression indicating a mind ill at ease.



AMPHITHEATRE.

It is difficult to forgive our fair France for encouraging these barbarous sports. Even as we write we hear of a toreador in the fair city of Valencia dying of his wounds. They are out of harmony with the refined and gentle character of the Gaul of our experience. But the French character is changing very much from North to South: and in the South they have always been much more allied to the hot-blooded Spaniard and fiery impulsive Italian, than to their kinsmen of the North. In fact North and South are not kinsmen, but separate and distinct races, living different lives, speaking a different language. The Provençal is rough and rude, revengeful and vindictive, and his swarthy complexion proves him somewhat allied to the African race. The men of Arles were not swarthy; we are only on the very fringe of Provence, and must penetrate further south for the true type; but the little rift within the lute is already evident, and its influence is distinctly felt.

They were very quiet and orderly that day in Arles. There was nothing of the mad excitement we had seen on a similar occasion in Valencia. When all was over, the men dispersed through the corridors and passages to the various exits as quietly as people going out of church. In their movement they were almost boorish, lethargic, and they went their way—and the women went theirs.

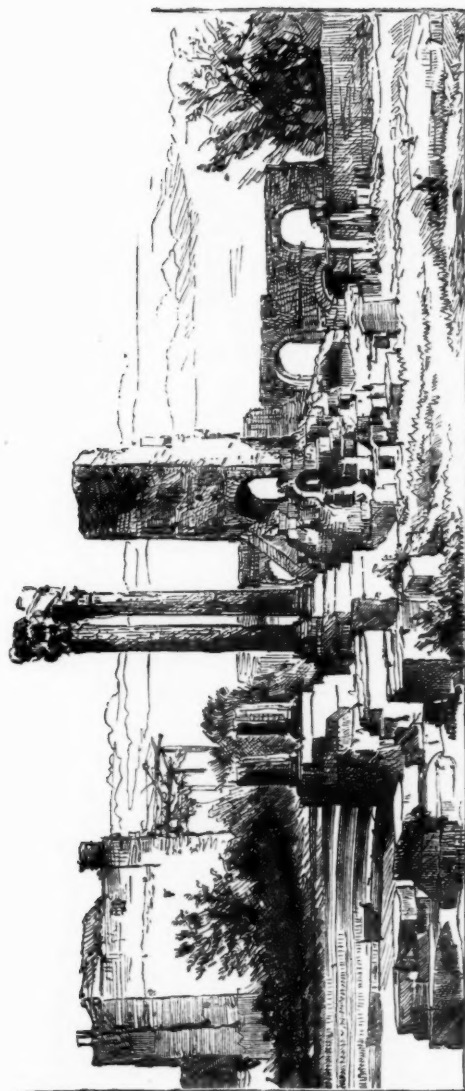
The sham bull-fight not only brought out all the people of the town, but crowds assembled from the country round; bands played in the streets; Arles was en fête.

On ordinary occasions it is a very sleepy place; a quiet provincial place, with little movement about it, and no bustle or excitement. Only on these fête days are the women en evidence, turning out in their gala dresses, and for the moment lighting up the dull streets with a charm no other town can boast of to an equal extent.

But as we have said, Arles is rich in vestiges of the past: its Roman remains. Within a stone's throw of the Amphitheatre are the ruins of the Theatre; ruins that have become mere fragments, but are still beautiful and interesting. Here you might almost fancy yourself gazing upon a part of the Roman Forum. Two Corinthian columns still stand crowned by their entablature, and outlined against the blue sky, they are marked by graceful proportions and refined beauty. One of the columns is of African, the other of Carrara marble. Behind them may still be seen the stage walls or proscenium. Many fragments of pillars stand about.

The theatre is said to have been begun in the reign of Augustus, and finished in the third century. In the course of time it became buried, and remained so until the seventeenth century. Many of the disclosed treasures are in the splendid Museum facing the Cathedral, whilst the celebrated Venus of Arles, also found here, is in the Louvre collection.

Standing before this remarkable ruin, one is vividly carried back in spirit to the days of ancient Rome. Not in Rome itself is the



THEATRE.

influence more felt : and if all these monuments and remains scattered through the length and breadth of the Lower Valley of the Rhone could be brought together, they would form an assemblage of antiquities that even Rome could hardly equal.

In the walls of the proscenium one traces the doors through which the actors went in and out. The stage must have been very large. In the semicircle devoted to the audience one still finds some of the seats, where they assembled to the number of 16,000.

Passing from this wonderful ruin down a narrow side street you soon reach the square which contains the Cathedral, Museum, and Hôtel de Ville : the latter a curious, and to some extent handsome, but not very interesting building dating back to the year 1673 : a debased age in architecture.

In the centre of the square rises a remarkable Roman obelisk composed of a single shaft of grey granite taken from the quarries of the Esterels—that isolated but interesting group of hills, with their cork and pine forests, that rise in the Province of the Var, overshadowing St. Raphael and a country where again so many Roman remains are to be found.

The obelisk belonged to an ancient circus outside the town, of which not a vestige remains, and for many centuries lay buried in the mud of the Rhone, where probably many other treasures still exist, biding their time : other obelisks, it may be, or a Venus to rival that of Milo and Arles, or gems from the great palace of Constantine, that stretched down from the Place du Forum—where stood the Forum—to the banks of the river : a gigantic building indeed, rivalling the palace of the Cæsars in Rome.

Here, gazing upon the broad river, within sight and sound of the sea, those Roman conquerors came, and thought out their mighty plans, and vanquished worlds, and never dreamed that a day would come when the glory of the empire should depart and become nothing but a recollection and a name.

Very near the resuscitated obelisk is the cathedral, dedicated to St. Trophimus, first Bishop of Arles, and, as we have seen, a disciple of St. Paul. The reader will remember that he is mentioned in the Acts, and again by St. Paul in the 2nd Epistle to Timothy. "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick"—Miletum being probably a misprint for Miletus. From this sickness he evidently recovered, and lived to carry on his master's work after that master had suffered martyrdom : journeying to the French shores of the Mediterranean, and there preaching Christianity and making converts.

The eye is at once arrested by the richness and splendour of the West Portal. The building itself is very ancient, and has been frequently altered and restored. It is said to have been placed on the ruins of the Roman Prætorium, and to have been consecrated under Constantine in the year 606.

The doorway, however, is distinctly twelfth century and Romanesque.



It projects from the main building, and is very curious and interesting. Its chief feature is a deeply recessed semicircular arch, extremely bold and beautiful in outline. The deep mouldings rest upon a richly-sculptured frieze, forming the lintel of the portal and resting on three pillars on either side the doorway. There are innumerable figures and heads of animals quaintly carved, and the piers rest upon carved lions. Many statues of apostles and saints are conspicuous, amongst them St. Trophimus and St. Stephen the Martyr.

It was Trophimus who, with Titus, journeyed to Corinth and conveyed St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Trophimus was a Gentile and a native of Ephesus; and though a great favourite with St. Paul, he once brought him into trouble, being the innocent cause of the uproar in Jerusalem, during which the doors of the Temple were closed and Paul was apprehended. The likeness of Trophimus in the doorway of Arles was no doubt left to the imagination of the sculptor, and in any case has been much softened and altered with time.

In the semicircular space over the doorway is an image of the Saviour sitting in judgment: and portions of the frieze represent scenes in the Last Judgment, somewhat grotesque it must be admitted, but very clever in execution, the good rising to heaven, but looking scarcely ethereal enough to float in the air, the bad consigned to flames and torment, and, to do them justice, with every appearance of deserving their



FRAGMENT OF FORUM.

fate. In the archivolt are rows of cherubim. The whole doorway is a magnificent example of the Romanesque, standing out conspicuously amidst doorways for interest and extreme richness of detail.

The interior is Romanesque and eleventh century, but has been much altered, other styles have been introduced, and much of its effect destroyed. It strikes one at once as bold and naked, destitute of ornamentation, in violent contrast with the rich west portal, which alone makes the church remarkable. The apse and choir are sixteenth century flamboyant, distinctly unpleasing. The nave is the best and most dignified part; long and lofty, in pointed work of the twelfth century, but plain and cold.

Apart from the west doorway, the great gem and attraction of the cathedral are the cloisters. They are very curious and beautiful, exquisite in tone, and of various dates.

The north side is of the Carlovingian period, going back to the ninth century: the east side is thirteenth century, the west fourteenth, and the south sixteenth. Two of the sides have Romanesque arches, and two Gothic. These rest on double shafts—a detail so often seen in cloisters—carved with figures of saints. The capitals of the pillars represent Scriptural subjects.

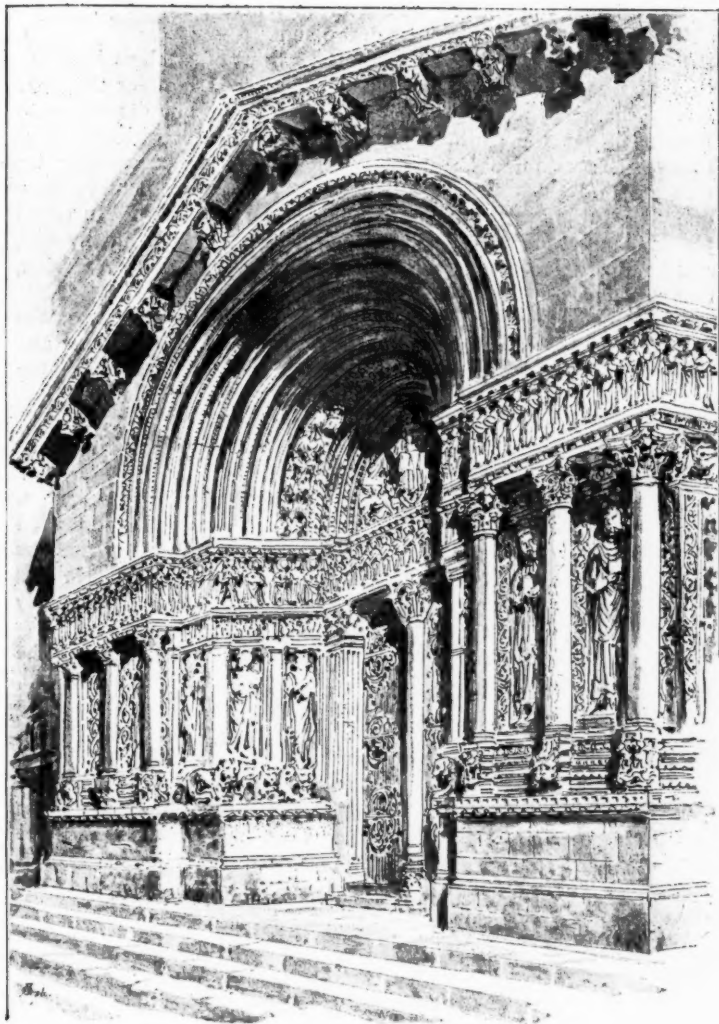
In the strong lights and shadows thrown by the sunshine, and again in the twilight of evening the cloisters were a dream of beauty. The poor custodian was a man who had all but lost his sight in a mining accident, and excited one's sympathy, as in melancholy tones he narrated how he had only the faintest glimmer left: sufficient to distinguish between night and day and to see men as shadows walking. So they had given him the custody of the cloisters, but it carried no pay with it, and he depended on the charity of visitors for his daily bread.

We accepted the story in good faith. The melancholy tones might be a little too woe-begone, the faint glimmer of light reveal men as more substance than shadow—we did not criticise or cross-question. But we wished to see the cloisters by moonlight, and he promised to get the keys from the sacristan; "for," said he, "every night I am locked up like a child, I and my wife and children; and if we want to get out, we cannot do so."

Alas, we could not ourselves come across the sacristan, and to the blind keeper he was tyrannical and hard-hearted.

At nine o'clock that evening, when the moon was well up, and light fleecy clouds were sailing across the dark blue sky, we made our way up the narrow side street and knocked at the quaint and beautiful doorway admitting to the cloisters.

In a few moments we heard shuffling footsteps coming down the vaulted passages: the cautious, hesitating footsteps of one who sees dimly or not at all. We pictured the stooping figures passing over the pavement, chequered by the strong lights and shadows thrown by



WEST PORTAL OF ST. TROPHIMUS.

the moon, the deep outlines of the double shafts the pointed or circular arches. Then a sliding shutter was withdrawn from the grating, and the melancholy face filled the open space.

"Why don't you open?" we asked. "Where are the keys?"

There came a deep, very long-drawn sigh.

"Hélas, messieurs, that sacristan has a heart of steel, as hard and cold as these stones on which I stand. I asked him for the keys. No. I begged them as a favour. No. I told him *ces messieurs* wanted to see the cloisters by moonlight. He pretended not to believe me: said moonlight was all nonsense and sentiment: the cloisters were much finer by daylight: he would give the keys to no one without the special permission of *Monsieur le Doyen*. In vain I pleaded, remonstrated. He went off jingling his keys in my ears, and humming '*Au clair de la lune, mon ami pierrot*.' He is a *scélérat*, that sacristan."

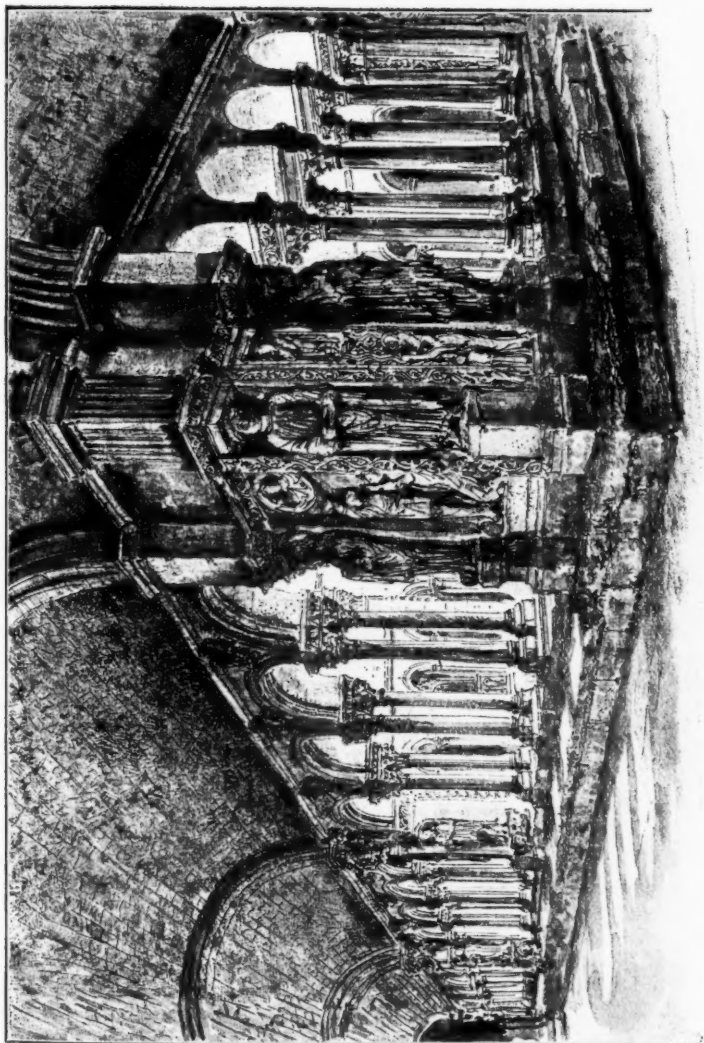
We echoed the sentiment, and hoped we should come across the sacristan on the morrow. H. C. proposed getting a ladder and scaling the walls; but as we were not cats, danger attended the experiment. We might suddenly tread upon air and drop down into unseen depths. There were also the authorities to be reckoned with. So we declined the interesting adventure and contented ourselves with a limited view of the cloisters through the grating.

It looked indeed a dream-world sleeping in the moonbeams. The passages were in darkness, excepting where the beams penetrated with a flood of silver light, white and pure and cold. Strong shadows lay athwart the pavement. Over all was the solemn silence and repose of night. More than ever we longed to enter, and mentally prepared a strong discourse for the sacristan when we found him.

But even the glimpse we had was a delight; a scene to be remembered, whilst from the square bell-tower rising above it all, there presently rang in slow sonorous tones, the hour of ten. As the last vibration died away, we wished the custodian good-night, bade him be of good cheer, promised to use our influence not only to get the hard-hearted sacristan despatched to some other scene of labour, but to procure him the custody of the keys as well as of the cloisters. He thanked us, wished us "*la bonne nuit, messieurs, portez vous bien*," closed the sliding shutter, and once more we heard the receding footsteps shuffling through the chequered passages.

We stood for a moment outside the fine doorway. It was a curious, ecclesiastical nook, lying back in a recess from the street. In spite of the moonlight there were dark impenetrable depths about us; outlines of walls and slanting roofs and overhanging gables: an air of mystery. Ghosts seemed to lurk in all the dark corners: "or, might they not be assassins armed with daggers?" suggested H. C. more prosaically and practically.

But assassins flee moonlight nights: and the queen was beautiful



CLOISTERS OF ST. TROPHIMUS.

and brilliant, and his teeth-chattering suggestion fell harmlessly to the ground.

The pale fleecy clouds were still hurrying along, white, ethereal, and beautiful as angels' wings, pursuing their rapid flight, silent and shadowy as spectres. But the charm of the spot had somewhat disappeared with the closing of the shutter, and we soon took our departure.

In the great square the obelisk was casting a lengthened shadow; and in the moonlight the west portal, etherealised and refined, was more than ever a dream. The streets were silent and deserted as we made our way through the thoroughfares where once stood the great palace of the Cæsars—or shall we say of Constantine?—and presently found ourselves on the ancient quay gazing upon the fast-flowing river.

Never was lovelier river-scene. It caught up the moonbeams in shimmering silver gleams, in a myriad lights and flashes: and we felt sure the sirens had come straight up from the Mediterranean and were holding court for our special benefit. We felt inclined to plunge within the depths and prove the truth of the fancy, and should have had a cold bath and a rude awakening for our pains—and perhaps an attack of lumbago.

So we contented ourselves with worshipping the sirens from a distance, refusing to be charmed though they charmed so wisely. The water swirled round the edges of the ruined Roman bridge, which year by year must be growing less—like the heat of the sun—since continual dropping will wear away a stone. Here and there a barge lined the quay, where nothing stirred, and nothing was heard but the occasional baying of a dog at the moon. They were very picturesque these solitary barges, lying under the moonbeams, all form and detail romantically softened by the silvery light.

On the other side were the ancient buildings going back to the days of the Romans: the remains of the Palace of Constantine; innumerable gabled outlines, old walls, and mullioned windows, all sleeping, softened, and subdued by the pale, magic light of the moon: a wonderful effect, and we had it absolutely to ourselves. As we stood, silently gazing, nothing but the quiet rush and swirl of the river broke the stillness of the night, save the occasional whine of a dog keeping guard on a barge. A magic scene indeed, than which the haunt of the sirens could not have been more beautiful, and probably would not have been half so wholesome. Beyond the river rose the outlines of the suburb of Trinquetaille, silhouetted against the dark night sky, lying in a deathly silence and stillness.

Earlier in the day we had paid a visit to another scene, where reigned a sort of death-in-life—or the opposite—in broad daylight. This was Les Aliscamps—the *Elisii Campi*, or *Champs Elysées* of Arles: where the Ancient Romans buried their dead: a very different





LES ALISCAMPS (STREET OF TOMBS).

idea and association from the Elysian Fields of Paris, where in the whirligig of life, death is the last thought to intrude.

These of Arles are very ancient. Ariosto mentions them in the 'Orlando Furioso'; Dante speaks of them in the 'Inferno.' Here the ancient Romans were buried. The cemetery was of great extent, and was consecrated by St. Trophimus for Christian burial. Its fame was world-wide, and from far and near it was the ambition of many that here their ashes should repose.

The Christian burial-ground was marked off from the Pagan: a vast area that has gradually contracted, so that ploughed fields and vineyards may now be seen where once reposed the ashes of the dead marked by crosses and sarcophagi. Some of the most remarkable of these have been removed to the museum of Arles—one of the richest museums in existence for its size—and others have been gathered together and placed on each side the Allée des Tombeaux or Street of Tombs.

This avenue is the first and chief thing to strike the visitor. There is a dignity, a calm restfulness about it. The tall poplars rustle and murmur in the wind, and their words must be grave and melancholy. At the far end of the avenue rises the interesting and remarkable church of St. Honorat. It is falling into ruin, but the remaining portion is of such amazing solidity that it will surely defy all time. Part of the church is very ancient, and part was rebuilt in the eleventh century in the Romanesque style. It was never completed. The beautiful octagonal tower with its two stages is also Romanesque. The crypt is very curious, and probably the oldest remaining portion.

The place is still used as a cemetery by the people of Arles, but the surrounding atmosphere, within a few feet of the gates, was anything but funereal. In the midst of death we are in life. Within a few yards there were drinking booths and cafés, and men and boys playing at bowls, and pitch and toss, making hay whilst the sun shone, gathering rosebuds whilst they might. It comes but once in a lifetime; youth, and a great power of enjoyment, and a freedom from dull care. "Donnez-moi vos vignt ans si vous n'en faites rien," was a popular song when we lived in Paris and paid visits to the Quartier Latin—more years ago than we care to remember: and this was apparently the idea of the Arlésiens of to-day. They made the most of their twenty years, and there were probably wiseacres amongst them who had passed the magic rubicon of youth, and were able to tell them that its hours were fleeting enough and they should make the most of them. The wisdom of Ecclesiastes was sealed to them, the Preacher unknown.

Like the Amphitheatre, the Roman Theatre, the Forum, the ruins of Trouille, les Aliscamps carried you vividly back to Roman times, but here clothed in more sombre and serious thought. Memento mori was in all the surrounding atmosphere. Man, it has been said, thinks everyone mortal but himself: in the sombre avenues of this

Roman burial-ground there was no room for that comfortable piece of deception. Time bears all its sons away and makes no exception. It has been doing so for 2000 years in les Aliscamps. Even the Wandering Jew lives only in tradition—like the Phantom Ship at sea.

From this to the moonlit Rhone, with its midnight silence and calm and hush, there was but a step, though divided by hours. It was still a death-in-life scene, but of a different sort, and with a distinct and separate influence. Under the night sky, under the silvery moonlight, it was all poetry and romance: the romance of a sleeping world unmindful of this marvellous beauty of nature reposing in all the mystery of night and darkness. We could have spent the livelong night marking the outlines of the ancient buildings, looking down upon the fragments of that ancient Roman bridge, watching the silent stars as they travelled westward with their queen, listening to the on-rushing of the river, and the song it ever sings.

“The fountains mingle with the river,  
And the rivers with the ocean;  
The winds of heaven mix for ever  
With a sweet emotion.

\* \* \* \* \*

And the sunlight clasps the earth,  
And the moonbeams kiss the sea!”

No sea here to-night: but in imagination we saw it thirty miles away: that deep blue azure sea, tideless, most interesting, most historical of all seas, on which this same moon was throwing all her brilliant light.

We turned away into the prosy streets of the town, and felt like those who return to a banquet room with garlands dead and lights put out. All romance in these dark hours lay in the wake of that wonderful river taking its way through the Valley of the Rhone.

Nevertheless, it is certain that Arles, with its living beauties and dead and decaying wonders: its visions of fair women, streets of tombs, crumbling monuments, the wonderful portal of its cathedral and its magnificent cloisters: is one of the magic towns of the world, where the young will lose their hearts—and heads—and the old may dream their dreams: where youth may pay its homage to beauty, and the more sober-minded antiquarian may worship his less uncertain mistress. And who shall say he has not the best of it?

As we made our way back to our most uncomfortable inn, where nothing in the shape of romance could live, all the fair and beautiful women were wisely cultivating their roses in beauty sleep. Not a creature was abroad. We wandered round for a last look upon the Amphitheatre and the Forum, the Obelisk and the splendid portal of St. Trophimus, and could but echo the words: “Arles est un veritable musée en plein air.” If only the landlady of the Hôtel du Forum would place herself in a glass case amongst the effigies, and allow someone to take her post who would not invite guests to a feast and place empty dishes before them!

### THREE BLIND MICE.

BY DARLEY DALE, AUTHOR OF "THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH."

"Three blind mice! See how they run!  
They all run after the farmer's wife,  
Who cut off their tails with the carving knife;  
Did ever you see such a thing in your life?  
Three blind mice!"—*Nursery Rhyme.*

#### I.

##### THE FARMER'S WIFE.

SHE was very young—she was also very pretty; but whether she was very wise these pages will show. Youth and discretion, beauty and wisdom, do not always walk together.

There was no manner of doubt about her beauty. Women might pick it to pieces; but so long as there were men in the world, old or young, there would be some one to put it together again, for none of the stronger half of creation could resist her.

Perhaps, as the women said, her mouth was too large; but then her dimples were so delicious, her smile so seductive, her lips so red, her little white teeth so even, that it did not much matter if this were a true bill.

Her hair was golden, and waved and curled round her white forehead in the most distracting fashion without any effort on her part. Her eyes were grey in some lights, and green in others, but brilliant as stars, with a trick of filling with tears, rarely allowed to fall, that gave them an appealing force no man who met that gaze had ever yet been able to resist. For the rest, she was fair as a white lily, with a rose-pink in her cheeks; plump as a partridge, with the neatest little figure in the world. A bright, joyous, laughing creature was Florence Armstrong, one who took life as she found it—and she found it uncommonly pleasant, so far as her experience went.

Married at eighteen, she was not twenty when John Armstrong, her husband, decided that, in view of the increasing agricultural depression, he must take farming pupils, if he could get them. They had room for three; he advertised, and he got three young men all more or less anxious to learn farming, and before they had been a month with him they were all more or less—two more and one less—in love with the farmer's wife. John Armstrong was what is called in Norfolk his native county, a gentleman-farmer; the term is an

ambiguous one, and is less used now than in former times when farming was a more profitable occupation than it is at present. Then the large tenant farmers of Norfolk were rich men, able to drive their carriages, as some do now, and send their sons to college, and live on the fat of the land, and speak with a brogue that would proclaim their county, if heard in New Zealand.

John Armstrong was a fine, big, handsome man, nearly twenty years older than his wife; he was rather aristocratic in appearance and bearing, and until he spoke would have been taken for a country squire; but directly he opened his mouth, the linked sweetness of the Norfolk sing-song twang proclaimed his bucolic calling. He was a well-educated man, too, but constant daily intercourse with his labourers had so habituated him to the Norfolk accent, that he was quite unconscious how badly he spoke. His wife was painfully aware of it, and in their billing and cooing days rallied him unmercifully about it; but it was all love's labour lost—in this particular she could not improve him, and by degrees she gave up trying to do so. She had one consolation—he was a very silent man. She was a clergyman's daughter, and her marriage was not altogether approved by her own family, though her father had cheerfully given his consent, for he was a poor man with a large family to provide for (of whom Florence was the eldest), and John Armstrong was in a position to give her far more comforts and luxuries than she was ever likely to have in her own home.

So they were married—he for love, she for money, said their neighbours, who, of course, knew more about it than they did themselves. But, in truth, there was not much doubt that John Armstrong was madly in love with Florence before they were married; though perhaps his shrewd old mother was right when she prophesied that, "he would soon get the better of that."

Hindringham House, which was their home, was an old manor-house about a mile from the village; it was approached by a road through several meadows, and in olden times had been surrounded by a moat; this was now filled in, except at one spot at the back of the house, where the trench had been enlarged and the water turned into it for a horse-pond. Poplars and willows had been planted on the old moat, and the house now stood surrounded by a belt formed by these trees, which alternated with each other; the willows were pollard, and the effect of the tall poplars was heightened by their stunted companions. At the back were the farm-buildings, stables, cow-houses, pig-sties, poultry-yards, barns, and rick-yards. On one side was a large kitchen garden, with tall box-fences all round the beds, and besides fruit and vegetables, a plentiful sprinkling of old-fashioned flowers; here were long rows of tall hollyhocks, great bushes of sweet lavender, of peppermint and rue, of old-man and sweet marjoram; here love-lies-bleeding and there love-in-a-mist; wild-thyme, bergamot, and other sweet-scented herbs perfumed the air;

fox-gloves and phloxes, sunflowers and wallflowers divided the vegetables, so that the kitchen-garden at Hindringham House was a place in which to wander, a place for meditation—at least in the summer months.

The front of the house was given up to an orthodox garden, with lawns and ribbon borders; and everywhere there were roses, for John Armstrong was a noted rose-grower, and always took prizes at the local horticultural shows for them.

It was in March that the three pupils arrived, two years after John Armstrong's marriage; but the spring is always late in the eastern counties, and it was June before the gardens began to look their best, and by then these three foolish young men had no eyes for any of the farmer's roses, but the fairest of all, the one they had no right to—his wife!

## II.

### THE BLIND MICE.

It was young Allenby who was the blindest, and he was also the eldest, so he might have known better. He was four-and-twenty, the son of a rich city merchant, and why he came to Hindringham at all was a problem Florence Armstrong had yet to solve. It certainly was not to learn farming, for he never attempted to learn anything, and half the morning's work on the farm was done before he was out of bed. He would ride or drive into Norwich once a week on market-day, dressed in the height of fashion, for he was a great dandy; he would occasionally go rabbit-shooting, and he would play tennis all day if any one would play with him; when no one would he read French novels, and he was always smoking.

Besides this, he made love most persistently but secretly to Mrs. Armstrong, and flattered himself he had only to whistle and she would go to him. He had a profound contempt for John Armstrong and his brogue; his goatee-beard of dark brown, and his curly hair; his grave, silent ways; his politics, and what Allenby stigmatised as his absurd religious opinions; his tailor and his industry were all equally objects of his scorn and sarcasm.

That any sane person could have thought this great, silent man, with his handsome face and fine manly figure, his country-made clothes and his Norfolk twang, more attractive than he with his little body so perfectly fitted by a West-end tailor, his pasty beardless face and convict-cropped hair, his racy conversation and up-to-date opinions, it never could have entered into Ralph Allenby's little head to conceive.

The second pupil was an Irishman, a wild, handsome dare-devil, who had just been sent down from one of the Universities, with a hint that his presence would not be required there again, so his



father had sent him to learn farming, with a view to his pursuing that occupation in one of the colonies eventually. Jack Luttrell was the name of this lively young Irishman. When he came to Hindringham he had one great passion—love of horses; he rode like a jockey, and the ambition of his life then was to meet the horse he could not break in.

Before he had been a month at Hindringham he had another passion, and a less innocent ambition; he was wildly in love with the farmer's wife, and thought if he could only distinguish himself by running away with her, he would have fulfilled his destiny very pleasantly, if not gloriously. He had quite as exalted an opinion of his own powers of fascination as Allenby had of his; but with more reason, for all women liked wild, handsome Jack Luttrell, with his dark blue Irish eyes, his fascinating manners, his witty conversation, and his daring, dashing performances in the hunting-field. He was musical, too, and sang very well in a rich baritone; he was a first-rate shot; he danced beautifully, and was good at all games. In fact, if life were all play, he would have taken most of the prizes; and there is no harm in saying at once, he stood first by a long way in Mrs. Armstrong's good graces; *facile princeps* was he with her, as with most women, to whom he chose to make himself agreeable.

George Taunton was the youngest of the pupils, he was the son of a Devonshire squire, and had come to learn farming in order to farm his own estate, and was the only one of the three who made any effort to fulfil the purpose for which they had all come to Hindringham. His affection for Mrs. Armstrong was of a milder form than Allenby's insolent admiration or Luttrell's wild passion; Taunton's was based on pity, supported by a boyish admiration for her beauty, and was not of a kind to outstep the limits of decorum, even in thought. He was intensely sorry for her, married to a man so much older and graver, and in some ways obviously so inferior to herself; she had so evidently, in the opinion of these three young men, sacrificed herself for the sake of her family, and married, if not for money, at least for a home.

Luttrell made no secret of his passion, he talked of it openly to his two comrades, who were much more reticent on the subject. Taunton was naturally reserved, and Allenby pursued his wooing slyly; but Luttrell was a man without guile: he had at any rate the courage of his vices, and certainly never tried to make himself out any better than he was.

It amused him, too, to try and rouse the farmer's jealousy; he had a shrewd notion that grave, silent, phlegmatic John Armstrong would be an awkward person to rouse, and this lent a spice of danger to his wooing, which added greatly to its charm.

Allenby was much more discreet; it was when no one else was present that he ventured to make love to his too charming hostess, while Taunton offered her the silent admiration and worship of a dog for its

master. There was one point on which these three were agreed, and spoke openly to each other, and that was that Mrs. Armstrong did not care a rush for her husband, and found life deadly dull, until they came to enliven it for her.

In fact, what she would do without them, was a constant source of wonder to them all ; it must be such a terrible life, shut up in that lonely poplar-grit house, with silent John Armstrong, who was busy from morning to night, and rarely found time to take his wife for a drive more than twice a week, which was apparently his sole idea of amusing her.

Certainly Florence Armstrong could not complain of lack of amusement now this trio had taken up their abode at Hindringham ; the silent adoration of George Taunton and his evident deep pity for her position, were no doubt very comforting to her ; the sly notes which Allenby contrived to drop into her work-basket, and the complacent way in which he made love to her when they were alone, gave a piquant interest to the daily round it certainly had previously lacked, while the difficulty she had in keeping Luttrell's wild passion within reasonable bounds effectually chased all dulness from her life.

If life had been uneventful and monotonous before John Armstrong took farming pupils, it was, if anything, rather too exciting now, and as Midsummer approached Mrs. Armstrong felt a crisis was at hand.

### III.

#### SEE HOW THEY RUN.

ON Midsummer-night the crisis occurred. For the last ten days Allenby's notes had become more impertinent, Luttrell's wild wooing more difficult to suppress. On the evening of Midsummer-day, as Mrs. Armstrong, assisted by Jack Luttrell, was gathering roses outside the dining-room window, he suddenly flung his arms round her and kissed her.

It was the work of a second, and the following instant she was standing, pale and trembling before him, her outraged dignity so manifest, that before she spoke he had knelt down on the gravel to beg her pardon.

"Dear Mrs. Armstrong, forgive me. I could not help it. If you only knew how——"

"Get up this moment ; and if you really wish to be forgiven, meet me this evening at half-past ten by the third willow on this side of the house. Wait behind it till I whistle, then if you like you may repeat your offence !"

Luttrell sprang up, raised from earth to heaven by her words ; but without waiting for his thanks, Mrs. Armstrong left him, cautioning

him as she went, on no account to come to her till she blew a whistle she always carried for her dogs.

On going to her work-table she found another note from Allenby, more daring than any of his previous effusions; she folded it up and put it carefully away with its predecessors, and then sat down to answer it.

"Be at the pond behind the house at ten this evening, and when I whistle, come to the pollard willow on the right-hand side, and you will find me behind it."

She twisted the slip of paper up, directed it, and put it on Allenby's plate, so that when he came to dinner, which was at seven o'clock, he would be sure to find it; and then she felt very happy. At dinner she asked Jack Luttrell if he would mind doing a commission for her that evening, which she knew would take him at least two hours.

"You will be back long before half-past ten," she added significantly; and Luttrell joyfully agreed to go directly dinner was over.

John Armstrong was more silent than ever that evening, and George Taunton's pity for his poor young wife worked deeper and deeper. After dinner Mr. Taunton walked round the old-fashioned garden, past the rue and the rosemary, the bergamot and the sweet-marjoram, the phloxes and the budding hollyhocks, till he reached a small summer-house, where he stretched himself full length on the seat and finished the cigar he was smoking, thinking of the great mistake Florence White had made in marrying John Armstrong. Then he must have fallen asleep, for the next thing he was conscious of was Florence's voice just outside the summer-house.

"Oh! Jack darling, how much longer must we bear it? We are never alone for a quarter of an hour all day long. You know, dearest, I would do anything in the world to please you, but really I don't know how to put up with this nuisance any longer!"

George Taunton inwardly cursed his bad luck for putting him in this invidious position; he was an unwilling listener to what was evidently a stolen meeting between Mrs. Armstrong and Jack Luttrell. To apprise them of his presence would place them all three in a very awkward position, so he quickly decided to remain quiet, keep their counsel, and feign sleep if discovered.

"We can never be alone, unless we steal a march on them like this. Jack, it is so dull, so deadly dull when you are not with me. I wish we could go to-night to a desert island and live there for the rest of our lives, and never be worried by other people again!" continued Mrs. Armstrong.

"Poor old Armstrong! I am really rather sorry for him. I did not know matters were as bad as this," thought Taunton.

The next moment, to his amazement, he heard John Armstrong's unmistakable East-Anglian twang, as he answered his wife.

"My darling child, how am I to get rid of them? Heaven knows

I hate having them as much as you do ; as you say, we have not a moment to ourselves ; the privacy of our home-life is entirely spoilt ; and as far as the money is concerned, if they paid three times as much as they now do, I would rather have their room than their company. The difficulty is, how are we to get rid of them ?" said Mr. Armstrong.

"I have thought of that, and I think I can get rid of two of them this very night, if you will only come with me," answered Mrs. Armstrong.

They moved on as she said this, and peeping through the trellis-work the astonished and dumb-founded George Taunton saw the tall figure of John Armstrong, with his young wife clinging, like the ivy to the oak, to his arm, walk in the fading light down the gravel path between the tall box-fences to the house. They went indoors for a few minutes, and when they came out again John Armstrong carried a riding-whip.

#### IV.

##### MIDSUMMER-NIGHT.

MIDSUMMER-NIGHT has long been sacred to the fairies ; long before Titania and Oberon held their court in that enchanted wood near Athens, did their predecessors keep their revels, "over hill, over dale, through bush, through briar," on Midsummer-night. And still maidens sow hemp-seed on Midsummer-night, and trembling, invoke them who are "to marry them to come after them and mow ;" and if mortals be still so foolish, who shall say that Puck is not still playing his pranks, and Oberon blinding mortals with the juice of love-in-idleness, on Midsummer-night ? Titania, no doubt, still sleeps on the "bank whereon the wild thyme blows," Peas-blossom and Cobweb, Moth and Mustard-seed are all in attendance, "hanging pearls on cowslips' ears," or "killing cankers in the musk-rose buds," they are all still there on Midsummer-night for the happy mortals who have eyes to see them.

It need hardly be said that Ralph Allenby's eyes had no power to discern fairies, and certainly they never entered into his thoughts, as he made his way to the trysting spot that evening shortly before the appointed hour. He did not wish to run any risk of being seen, so he made for a spot between the pond and the willow behind which Mrs. Armstrong was to hide ; here the tall grasses and a few stunted alder and willow made cover, under which he stretched his small body to await the signal. Jealous Oberon was no doubt near to him, and gentle Puck playing his pranks close by, but Allenby had eyes and ears only for her whom he had come to meet ; nor had he long to wait before he heard footsteps approaching, and with the footsteps, voices. Florence's voice, Florence's footsteps, but, alas !

for Mr. Allenby, another's voice, another's footsteps also, and that other no less a person than big, handsome, burly John Armstrong and his unmistakable twang.

They came nearer and nearer, until they were within a dozen steps of the lover cowering in the high summer grasses ; on the other side of him was the horsepond, in front the house, with a gravel walk and a small stretch of greensward between it and him, and close behind him a very steep grassy slope, the bank of the old moat, and a meadow at the foot of it. If John Armstrong should prove aggressive escape would be difficult, for the bank was almost perpendicular and some fifteen feet deep, while to attempt the other routes would be to rush either into the horsepond or the farmer's arms. Allenby knew nothing about Puck and his pranks, but so soon as he heard John Armstrong's voice, he knew mischief was in the wind ; he knew he had been duped by the fair Florence, but to what extent he was not yet aware.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" asked Mr. Armstrong, and as he spoke he cut savagely at the tall grasses with his riding-whip, the swish of which made anything but a pleasant accompaniment to his sing-song accent.

"Because this is the first note I have ever answered. I didn't take any notice of the others."

"I'll take notice of them when I catch the young scoundrel," said Armstrong, and swish went the whip again as it beheaded some innocent grasses. Allenby lay prone, cursing his luck and his folly, and vowing, if he quitted the scene with unbroken bones, never would he willingly set eyes on the farmer or his fair but cruel wife again.

"Perhaps if I whistle he will come to me, and then you can settle accounts with him," said Mrs. Armstrong.

"Whistle, by all means, and I'll break every bone in the little cockney's body."

Mrs. Armstrong whistled, but Allenby, instead of going to her, crept as noiselessly as he could to the edge of the bank ; he was not more than six feet from it when she whistled a second time, and the farmer strode about looking for his victim. Allenby had made up his mind of the two evils the less was to run the risk of breaking his neck by scaling the grass escarpment, rather than the alternative of allowing John Armstrong to break all his other bones, as he threatened to do.

The grass was so long that, perhaps, by dint of digging his hands and toes deep into the bank, and clutching at the grass, he might drop down safely, and certainly a big, heavy man like John Armstrong would not dare to follow him, and once safe in the meadow below, he could trust to his legs, for he was fleet of foot, to save him.

"There is something in the long grass ; I believe that is the young rogue. I'll answer his notes for him!" cried the farmer, as Allenby's

head appeared above the grass, when he reached the edge of the bank.

Taking his courage in both hands, digging his toes into the bank, and clutching wildly at the roots of the grasses, Allenby, with beating heart, managed to drop unhurt, beyond a few scratches, to the ground; but his suit of light grey cloth was spoilt, the dewy grasses had greened it, the damp earth soiled it, and he dared not stop to pick up his hat, which fell off as he reached the bottom. He took to his heels, and ran as fast as they would carry him to the station, where, by a stroke of good fortune, he met George Taunton, who had been sending a telegram to himself summoning him home at once, and who undertook, on hearing a garbled version of Allenby's story, to send his portmanteau down to him. John Armstrong, who reached the edge of the bank just as Allenby dropped to the ground, shouted after him a warm threat of dire vengeance if he ever crossed his path again, brandishing his whip as he spoke, to give emphasis to his words, and the frightened fairies crept into the sleeping buttercups, and a peal of laughter that might have been Titania's, so silvery and low was it, broke from Florence Armstrong, as she joined her angry lord and master.

"Jack, darling, I never saw you in such a rage before. I am glad he escaped; there is one gone for good; and I expect we shall get rid of another before we go in. Come and walk round the garden again; I have something else to tell you to-night, when you are cooler."

While Mrs. Armstrong cajoled the husband she worshipped into a better mood, not a very difficult task, for his anger was short-lived, and strolled with him, like the lovers they were, round the garden, Jack Luttrell waited with folded arms and beating heart, leaning against the willow Florence had pointed out. He dared not smoke, lest that should reveal his presence; but he had more poetry in his composition than Allenby, and the beauty of the summer night was not lost on him.

He felt the enervating influence of the warm night-air, the subdued shining of the stars in the Midsummer sky, still palpitating as it was with the light that had fled for a few hours, calmed his thoughts; the long journey he had just been for Mrs. Armstrong had exhausted some of his superfluous energy; the remembrance of his offence troubled him, even though he was there to repeat it unrebuked; altogether he was in a subdued mood. He had come to be forgiven, it behoved him to be penitent, if he wished to taste the full sweetness of his pardon, and the memory of Mrs. Armstrong's anger made him fear his passion was hopeless; and yet the promise she had given that under certain conditions he might repeat his original offence, gave him hope.

He was susceptible to the influences of nature, his soul was in harmony with her present mood, and he yielded himself to the subtle



spell of Midsummer-night's beauty. He did not see the fairy-queen, he did not hear the pixies' laughter, he did not think of Puck and Oberon, but he was quite in the frame of mind to believe in their presence in this witching hour of night. And then athwart the fairies' music, the grasshoppers' chirping, the reeds sighing in the summer breeze, came the sound of the voice he loved, and of footsteps he knew boded evil, and peering in the direction from which they came he saw Mrs. Armstrong and her husband, he with his arm round her waist, and she leaning on his shoulder, come towards the willow against which he was resting.

He slipped behind it as they paused close beside it, and presently he heard Florence say: "Jack, what would you do to any man who should dare to kiss me in your presence?"

"That is your little game, is it, madam!" thought Jack Luttrell, his Irish blood kindling at the trick she had played upon him, for Puck was not the only mischief-maker this Midsummer-night.

"Don't be foolish, my darling child; the man who would dare to do such a thing is not yet born," said Armstrong.

"I am not so sure of that; but just try and imagine what you would do if he did."

"Well, I should half-throttle him first, and flog him within an inch of his life afterwards."

"A pleasing prospect, and a threat you are quite capable of fulfilling, my boy; all the same, I should dearly love to do it," thought Luttrell.

"But, as I said before, no man would dare to do such a thing," continued Mr. Armstrong.

"Don't be too certain. I think I know one who would," said Mrs. Armstrong.

"I am sure I know one who will," thought Luttrell.

"Who is he?" asked the farmer.

"I'll whistle, and perhaps he will appear," said Mrs. Armstrong.

"He won't if he is wise," said John Armstrong grimly, and he still carried a riding-whip.

Luttrell did not move from his hiding-place, but he quietly kicked off his shoes, and waited his opportunity.

"I am afraid you will have to be content with your old husband's attentions, now we have got rid of that young scamp Allenby," said Armstrong, and Jack Luttrell wondered how this had been accomplished since dinner.

"I shan't be content till we two are alone once more, and never, never, never will I have any pupils again. Promise me you will let me have my way in this, will you, dearest?"

"I wonder what you don't have your way in," said Armstrong fondly.

"Well, I wanted some one to come to my whistle, I have not had my way in that. I'll try again." She whistled again, but still Luttrell did not move.

"Are you quite sure you want to be alone with me again?" asked John Armstrong tenderly.

"Jack, you know I am never happy except when you are with me."

"And you are certain you won't miss these three?"

"I am certain I shall be truly thankful to get rid of them. Jack, you know I only live for you; I want no one, nothing but you," said Mrs. Armstrong.

"By St. Patrick then, you shall have something you don't want before you are much older. I did not come here for nothing to-night, madam," thought Luttrell, as he watched the pair move slowly away, Mrs. Armstrong's cheek pillowed on her husband's shoulder, his arm round her waist.

They were too much absorbed in each other now to have eyes or ears for anything else. Mrs. Armstrong had forgotten Luttrell's existence, and John Armstrong was as unsuspicious of his presence as he was of the fairies and elves, the sprites and pixies that lurked in the sleeping flowers and hid among the fragrant summer grasses.

Noiselessly, treading on tip-toe, Jack Luttrell crept behind the unconscious couple, who had paused for a moment to gaze silently at the stars, for John Armstrong was still young enough to feel the witching spell of Midsummer-night. As they paused and gazed into the star-depths, Luttrell bent over Mrs. Armstrong and kissed her up-turned cheek. She was so completely taken by surprise that she gave a little scream as she clung closer to her husband; but before Jack Luttrell had time to escape the farmer had seized him by the collar with his left hand; there was a brief scuffle, and then Luttrell wriggled away, leaving his empty coat with John Armstrong, and ran towards the front of the house.

The farmer followed, but Luttrell was younger and had three or four stone less to carry, and he turned the corner towards the front of the house a few seconds before Mr. Armstrong. When the latter turned it, there was not a sign of Luttrell, it was impossible he could have reached the hall-door so quickly, equally impossible he could have crossed the wide sweep of gravel between the house and garden; nevertheless, Puck himself was not less visible than Jack Luttrell.

The farmer paused a moment in bewildered astonishment, half wondering if he were awake and in his sober senses, and then he went into the house through the open door where he met a maid-servant.

"Did Mr. Luttrell come in just now?" he asked.

"No, sir," answered the startled maid; and her master rushed out again to look for his quarry. But he did not set eyes on Jack Luttrell again that night, nor for many a long year. While he was searching the garden and out-premises, Luttrell was packing a few things in his own room, having entered the house by the dining-room window, which was open as he passed, and before John Armstrong gave up looking for him, he was well on his way to Norwich.

The next morning a telegram, summoning George Taunton to Devonshire, arrived with the letters, and the farmer and his wife were left alone once more; and then Mrs. Armstrong made a clean breast of what she had done to rid herself of the trio, and why she had done it.

"But how did Taunton know anything about it?" asked John Armstrong.

"He overheard us talking; he was in the summer-house, and I knew he was there."

Thus did Mrs. Armstrong cut off the tails of her three blind mice.



#### ABSENCE.

DEAREST, although we be  
By distance parted,  
Oft do I think of thee  
When lonely-hearted;  
And that sweet thought doth bring  
Visions before me,  
Bright as a seraph-wing  
Hovering o'er me.

Visions of thy dear smile  
And all thy beauty,  
Shedding a halo round  
The path of duty,  
Ever inspiring me  
To new endeavour,  
Binding love's soul in bonds  
Nothing can sever.

Love that is worth the name  
Never can falter;  
Always it burns the same  
On the heart's altar—  
Not a consuming glare,  
Wearing and fretting,  
But bright, and warm, and fair,  
And self-forgetting.

ELIZABETH GIBSON.



BY LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN the principal parlour of Master Ambrose Kirby's house in Baignton, a most important meeting was being held. The chief men of the town had assembled to discuss the anxious question of the popular discontent, and the best means of pacifying it.

"There is a degree of lawlessness and recklessness among the people that I, in my experience, have never yet seen," said the good vicar Dr. Abraham Burnside. "And that wild expedition to Kettering Mere hath maddened them yet further."

"Some mischief there must be at the back of it," said Dr. Gurdon, decidedly. He was the head leech of the town, and as such for many years had held undisputed sway over the bodies of his fellow-townsmen. A narrow, bigoted and most obstinate man, his rancour against Mistress Annora formerly, and her daughter now, waxed furious and implacable when their names were even mentioned. He waved his hand loftily. "Could I but trace that mischief home, and put a stop to it," he said, "we should proceed with ease to stay this epidemic with the proper remedies."

"Men say that the proper remedies have done more harm than good," said Ambrose gloomily. "Look at this hand of mine!"

He held out his once strong brown hand; it was thin and knotted, and trembled.

"I had but just emerged from the fever stage of this accursed malady, and would fain have eaten the good broth my mother had made for me, when you, good Master Gurdon, did take it from my hands, give me fasting for good food, and a blood-letting such as I had never undergone in the best of times. Since then I have been stiff with aching pains, and my hand shakes as if with palsy."

"So, so," said the leech complacently. "But for that blood-letting, my good friend, at this moment you would have been in the grave;

and as for the pains you speak of, they are but the sign that the poison is expelled."

"Maybe, but, gentlemen, it seems that those whom my young Lady Stourton deigns to treat, recover without blood-letting," said one of the gentlemen.

"And about that also we must take counsel," said Dr. Gurdon. "To you, friend Burnside, I appeal as one bound to protect the safety and religion of our humbler neighbours. This curing wrought by Dame Stourton is from an unholy source."

"It is false," cried Ambrose, but detaining hands were placed on his shoulders, and unnerved by the rheumatic fever from which he had scarcely emerged, he sank back trembling.

"Is there one among us," said a stout old master-miller, "who would put the thing to the test that we might see the experiment? Men say that Lady Stourton obeys all summons to the poor. I have two cases now; my kitchen-scullion has an old father of seventy-five lying at death's door, and his brother scarce forty is as ill; they dwell in Lime Street near the slaughter-house, and are very poor. They sent up a child to my house this morning for food, but I forbade it, seeing that we have your advice, friend Gurdon, that fasting is the only safe remedy."

"What would you propose?" said Abraham Burnside.

"To let my Lady Stourton know of these cases and beg her charity. She shall have old John for her patient, and Gurdon shall have Mat."

"I decline," said the leech, waving his velvet plumed hat. "I decline! I to enter into rivalry or competition with one who hath undoubtedly occult powers! You respect not my dignity and calling!"

A messenger knocked loudly at the door. "I crave your pardon, my masters," said the man humbly, "but a lady stands without, with her waiting-woman, and begs to be admitted to your worshipful presence."

The gentlemen looked at each other. Master Kirby broke the silence. "Pray her to come in," he said. "She may have somewhat to say that may aid us, and, God knows, we need help, for He hath sorely afflicted this town."

There was a moment's pause, and then the door was once more thrown open, and two females were ushered in. Both were enveloped in long and ample riding-cloaks, and both wore hoods from which veils fell and hid their faces.

The foremost of the two advanced to the table and then threw back her hood and veil and stood before the assembly, revealing to their astonished gaze the haughty beauty of Isobel Stourton.

The men all instinctively rose to their feet.

"Be seated, my friends," she said, seating herself. "I am fortunate in finding you thus assembled, for as you well know, though the management of all business is necessarily and rightfully in the hands

of men, yet when health and sickness are concerned, the counsel of the women-folk has ever been held of value. All know how dear the welfare of the poor has been to my aunt, the widow of Sir Michael Stourton, and to myself who have ever been a daughter to her."

There was a murmur of approval and admiration through the assembly.

Isobel leaned her arms on the table, there was a look of solicitude on her face, though her magnificent dark eyes flashed. She lowered her voice.

"Things are not as they should be, gentlemen, and we would fain arrive at the source of the evil. On every side, men, women and children are dying, and the cry of the poor goeth up to Heaven above."

"Who can tell that this just punishment may not avail?" said Dr. Burnside. "There have been dark sins amongst us."

Isobel's voice sank lower, so that it was toneless.

"Aye, the priest himself confesses it. Some atonement is necessary, something must be done to stop the plague. There have been dark sins among us, even in our very midst. What say you, masters? Is any sin so wholly condemned as that of which the sacred Scripture speaks, when it says 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.'"

Again Ambrose Kirby would have sprung forward, but a hard hand gripped him and he fell back with a heavy groan.

They sat staring at her without speaking, then Dr. Gurdon broke the silence, saying: "Concerning this same witchcraft, friends, many phenomena thought to be supernatural can oft-times be traced to purely physical causes, but at the same time far be it from me to say that the sin hath no existence."

"It were ill-policy to doubt the evidence of Holy Writ," said a thin man with an expression of fixed melancholy in his sour face. "I in this plague have lost mine only son. Heaven blessed me with five daughters and one son, my masters, and he—he died."

"A sore grief," said Isobel looking at him compassionately. "But I would lay before you some strange facts. Look you; I wish to prove that I myself am disinterested; that for your sakes, for yours who have suffered deeply as you, sir, have suffered, and for the sick, and dying poor, I even am prepared to sacrifice to you the honour of my house."

"Hold," cried Ambrose fiercely. "We will have no more. Believe me, friends, there is no hand but the hand of God in this His visitation. Let us do as our duty points. Let us proclaim a fast, and a day of humiliation spent before the altar, and so by the fervour of our intercession shall the plague be stayed."

"Nay," said Isobel softly. "Good Master Kirby, I can see how this sore illness has weakened you. I pity your sufferings and would fain cure them, and restore to you the calm judgment and wise powers that were formerly so well known. Until Heaven has restored



these gifts and healed you, were it not well to take no part in a discussion so painful that only the strong should undertake it?"

"She is right," said Dr. Gurdon pompously. "We must beg of you, my friend, either to be silent, or to withdraw."

Ambrose sank back again. Weak as he was, his shrewd sagacity was not at fault; he would be silent, would even by his silence appear to tacitly approve, and so learn the worst, for he knew well what was coming.

"Master Gurdon," said Isobel, "did you see Mat Clover yesterday?"

"That did I in truth. I left him when all hope was over. Is he dead?"

"He is well. The fever has left him and when last I saw him, he was eagerly supping porridge made for him by——"

"Is it so? Is it so? Then there must be something wrong. What wrought the cure?"

"A little powder of which Lady Stourton gives a small quantity in distilled water."

"No drug was ever known to stop the death-rattle in a dying man," muttered the leech.

Isobel spoke again.

"I have told you, friends, that for your sakes I would even deliver up the honour of the family, but I was wrong in so speaking. It is *for* the honour of our family and the safety of our town that the evil must be rooted out. There is treachery in our midst. The woman that hath bewitched Ralph Stourton, the woman who by her wiles now rules his hearth, is the cause of this ill, and here, borne out by this witness" (and she placed her hand on Janet) "I will prove to you that she, Nell Stourton, the woman whom men have called My Lady Moon, is a witch!"

They sat round her with gaping mouths, horror-stricken. The strongest indictment seeming that this girl was denouncing the wife of her nearest kinsman, and openly sacrificing the honour of her house.

Master Kirby said nothing, his heart beat heavily, the chill pains tortured his limbs, and ever he thought to himself, "How can I save her? will my strength in this council carry any weight?"

He bent again to listen, for once more Isobel was speaking.

She spoke long and without pause. She put before them all the strange evidence she had so skilfully pieced together. She told of the thunder-storm at Kettering Mere, of the terrible fits which troubled herself and Janet. She dwelt on the power Nell exercised over sick and wounded, on the infatuation which had made Harry her faithful champion, and which had resumed its sway over her young husband in spite of his growing distrust. She told how that very day Ralph had turned upon her, Isobel, and bade her honour Nell, or never more look on him as kinsman. And then she told how, on the night

that the rabble had visited Kettering Mere, Nell herself was there, and that she had disappeared from their very midst, so that none knew whither she had gone. "And now," she cried, "I call upon you as you are men and protectors of law, to find some way to destroy this accursed thing, lest it grow from worse to worse. I leave you to discuss the question; I will say no more. Only mark this, it is no light thing to do as I have done, to lay bare to you the secret evil that is corroding the peace and honour of my house, and nothing but the gravest sense of the public need would have torn it from me. I commend me to you, gentlemen."

She drew her veil round her as she spoke, and with a grave curtsey, she left the room, the men standing up and bowing low as she passed out.

They sat down again and turned blanched faces to each other. At first no one spoke; then Dr. Gurdon broke the silence.

"This reputation is not new," he cried. "Men said strange things of Mistress Annora Miles."

Dr. Burnside shook his head sadly. He knew, but he could not betray the fact that this fatal tale had been spread to hide the secret Papist gatherings.

The discussion went on till dusk, and when the assembly broke up, the gentlemen hurried away to their own homes, feeling that the question was too difficult for them; that even if this hideous guilt that they suspected were a fact, and no mere outcome of ignorant superstition, it would be too dangerous for them to move in the matter. For were not the feudal powers of the Castle and Satan himself in conjunction against them!

## CHAPTER XXVII.

MEANWHILE the light of happiness once more lit up Nell's beautiful eyes. She could scarce forbear from singing joyously as she went about her household duties. All her fear of her young lord had vanished away, she basked and sunned herself in his love. The little one grew and thrived well, and Isobel became gentle, and though ever avoiding her touch, no longer shrank from her presence.

The ladies of the Castle found that more than ever their wholesome food and simple remedies were in request, and to many piteous cases of want and sickness they rode far, carrying food and wine and warm clothing.

At last one day the blow fell. Ten cases of influenza broke out on the same night in the Castle household. In the town and neighbourhood things were improving; it seemed as if light were breaking through the clouds at last—and the Castle household had been proudly boasting that here at least they were exempt; but that night

the strange wave of sickness passed over them like a blight and ten of them were stricken low.

The first to fall ill was Isobel, and she would fain have allowed none to nurse her but Janet; but the girl sickened within a few hours of her mistress, and could do nothing for her.

Whether the main violence of the epidemic had now exhausted itself or not, the illness seemed to be of a less virulent character than it had assumed at Bainton. One old man only died after an attack which lasted little more than forty-eight hours; but the others recovered well, and after an anxious fortnight of nursing, Lady Stourton and Nell began to tell themselves that the worst was over. Then quite suddenly once more their hopes died down.

Harry Stourton complained of violent headache and pains in all his limbs. He came into the room as usual, when the family were assembled after supper, and stood before the fire. Nell looked up from her spinning-wheel and exclaimed:

"Harry, you are ill. Give me your hand. Yes, I am right; it burns with fever. Make no delay, but go to your bed."

Isobel, weak from her recent illness, grew very pale.

"Ralph," she exclaimed, "if he indeed be ill, send for Dr. Gurdon. Let him not die. Let him have proper care."

"You did not die, Isobel," said her aunt coldly; "and yet you had no care but mine, and the like care shall I give Harry."

She put her arm round him tenderly and led him away. Isobel broke into tears.

"He will die!" she sobbed. "He is already so fragile and so wasted!"

"Dear Isobel," said Nell gently, "we will do our best for him."

"So you but keep away from him there might be some hope," she said sullenly; then startled by the black frown gathering on Ralph's brows she went away to her own room.

Harry lay down on his bed of sickness with the brave faith and resignation that ruled his young life.

"Dearest Aunt Mary," he said, holding her hands, "I feel as if I were placing myself in my mother's hands. May I call you mother?"

She nodded, kissing him to hide that her eyes were full of tears.

"You will not leave me?" he said two or three times during the night as the fever grew higher and the strange feeling of unutterable illness characteristic of this disease grew on him. Before dawn his senses had fled and he had entered into the dark shadowland of delirium.

Day and night Lady Stourton and Nell alternately watched by his bed. His ravings were not violent, but at times they were sorely distressing, for it seemed as if he were striving, and ever striving more and more, anxiously to fulfil some task that he had set himself and that he could not accomplish: he seemed exhausted by the useless effort to grasp the idea of what this task could be, yet could

he not give it up, and no gentle words could penetrate the isolation of the labouring brain to comfort or relieve.

At times Sir Ralph would endeavour to take a part in the nursing ; but he could not do it. The inability to help broke him down, and in an agony of trouble and despair he entreated his mother and wife to call in Dr. Gurdon to their aid.

"He is no better," he urged. "All the other cases you have cured so well have been slight compared to this. Isobel tells me that Dr. Gurdon counsels quite a different treatment. The responsibility is too great. Send for him."

"If you indeed command it, Ralph," said Nell sorrowfully, for she dreaded the first step that the leech would take, the use of the lancet.

"Yes, I do wish it. I will send for him at once," said Ralph, and Nell went back to Harry's bedside. She strove hard to fancy that he was better—she could not deceive herself—and yet the distress was less. He was now singing snatches of songs to himself, the wonderfully sweet tenor notes running easily up and down the scale ; but, as she bent down and looked into his eyes, she met the same strange look of unconsciousness—the blank absence of all response that ever breaks the heart of the loving watcher.

Twilight was passing into darkness when the messenger returned from the town, bringing not Dr. Gurdon but a smaller, less important leech who had recently come into the town. He reported that the worthy Gurdon himself was ill and unable to come, so that he ventured to offer his poor services. He showed a testimonial written by Master Ambrose Kirby speaking warmly, even enthusiastically, of his skill which had done wondrous good to himself. The leech was a man of middle age, small and timid of aspect, and moreover half-fed and very poor.

When Nell saw the way in which he approached the patient and entered into the case, once more her hopes revived and she recognised skill far beyond her own. Some of the attendants had made all preparation for bleeding ; but he waved them away.

"This is no case for such treatment," he said. For the feeling of confidence with which the good man inspired her, Nell thanked God with tears in her eyes.

That night neither of his two nurses nor the doctor left Harry for one moment ; the fever rose again till the touch of his hand burned like fire, and the delirium grew wild. Towards morning it reached its height. He sang, his voice ringing with the old sound triumphant and clarion-like through the Castle :—

"Over an evil world  
Dark thoughts will brood ;  
Satan's banner unfurled,  
At war with good.  
But the day will break  
Through iron-bound pain,  
And Christ will conquer—  
Will conquer and reign."

His voice dropped suddenly, and while the echo still vibrated with the sound, a great silence fell, a silence profound as that of the grave.

The hours stole on. Over and over again they thought him gone, and the doctor was but just able to force a few drops of strong cordial between his lips. Then with the dawn of day came a new complication, the rattling, difficult breathing, the sharp suffering as the cruel poison settled upon the lungs.

Twice that day Ralph came in, but was forced to go, unable to bear the sight and sounds. Once he was so overcome that Nell was constrained to leave Harry and follow him to his room, there for a long time to strive in vain to comfort him.

"It is so hard, so hard," he said, "that a man such as he is, in the very perfection of youth, should die. It is such a waste of life and strength and all that is best worth having."

"He would not say so, dear Ralph," said Nell with streaming eyes. "He would say, the more perfect the gift the more meet for sacrifice."

"Ah, that sacrifice," cried Ralph. "What have we done that the joys of life can only be bought by pain?"

"That shall we know some day," faltered Nell. "Harry would say—Harry——"

"He shall not die!" cried Ralph passionately. "I will tell yonder leech that if he save his life I will make his fortune; he shall be rich and the country shall ring with his fame."

"Nothing will be wanting that he can do, or that we, our mother and I, can do," said Nell softly. "But the outcome is in God's hands, and if it be His Will to take our Harry——"

Ralph made a movement of restless misery.

"While life lasts, there is hope, they say," he said. "But that changed face, those moans. Nell, I find no room for hope!"

A message came to the door, an urgent call for Nell from the doctor, and with a loving gesture to her husband she sped away.

The days dragged on, the cruel suffering came and went, but the strength held out, and at last there came a day on which for the first time hope dawned. The labouring breathing grew slower and more easy, the eyes, large and strained with terrible pain, closed heavily and he slept.

Lady Stourton was sitting by him when the change began, her hand in his. She dared not move lest the slightest change of posture should disturb this blessed sleep. As the hours passed Nell came softly and fed her, or she would have become exhausted. At last the doctor moved Harry just enough to pour a few spoonfuls of strong broth between his lips, and in that moment released her. It did not wake Harry, he moaned a little, but moved not, and as the sleep went on, his breathing became calm and easy as a child's, and a look of relief and repose smoothed out the painful lines in the thin young face.

The doctor never left him night or day. With the same keen eye and soft movements he watched him, his whole heart absorbed in his patient.

At length there was a slight movement, his large eyes opened, and they saw within them once more the precious light of reason. He spoke in a whisper, hardly above his breath, only one word, "Mother."

"I am here. Do not speak, my own precious boy," said Lady Stourton. "Swallow this."

He did as she bade him, then spoke once more very softly.

"Good-night, mother," then turned a little and slept once more.

The doctor rose, staggered a little as he crossed the room, and sank down on a chair in the outer chamber. He passed his handkerchief over his brow.

"Give me some food," he said faintly. "Thank God the worst is over; he will live."

Sir Ralph with his own hands brought him food and wine, and showed him a room where at last he might allow himself some hours of rest.

After that crisis, slowly and by minute degrees, Harry came through the weakness that succeeded his illness. It was many days before he could feed himself, or sit propped up by pillows in his bed, and many more passed before he was able to leave that bed, or stand alone. But at last to the great joy of the whole house, he was able once more to resume his downstairs life among them. Throughout the cold damp autumn they vied with each other in the care they took of him, and his spirit of cheerfulness and courage was such that there was some danger of their thinking him more completely recovered than he was.

The good doctor, as soon as he deemed Harry out of danger, rushed back to the crowded streets of Bainton. He was laden with gifts and offers of service from his hosts, and he knew that as soon as the epidemic was over he would find his fortune made, for Sir Ralph Stourton was a powerful and staunch friend.

But the good man gave himself no time to rest. He found himself an object of the liveliest interest to everyone, for curiosity and slander had been rampant, and the doctor grew pale with horror over the tales with which they greeted him, and the close questioning to which he was subjected.

Popular feeling had grown so high and so unmanageable that mob-meetings were constantly held in the streets, in which the wildest and most improbable reports were hotly discussed, and threats and execrations uttered with daily increasing violence.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONE night, in the month of November about midnight, a message was brought to Sir Ralph, saying that a gentleman from Baignton desired to see him privately on most urgent business.

Fortunately he had not yet gone to bed; though Harry was now nominally recovered from his illness, he yet required and received much care. During the first hours of the night he suffered much from coughing, and was always restless and uneasy, and Ralph, whose affection for him was that of a most loving brother, had fallen into the habit of sitting with him after the ladies had gone to their rooms, keeping up his fire and talking with him until the feverish restlessness gave way to sleep. On this cold raw night he was keeping his customary vigil, so that when the message was brought to him by the night-porter, he was able to respond to it at once.

He threw logs on the fire, and placed the cup of lemon water so close to Harry that he could himself reach it to appease the parching thirst from which he suffered, and then, believing that his cousin dozed, he went softly downstairs wondering much at so peremptory a summons.

The porter had lighted lamps and hastily rekindled the fire in the hall, and now he ushered in the gentleman who wore a large cloak with the fur-trimmed collar so disposed as to throw his face altogether, into shadow. When the man had left them, he threw off this disguise, and to the young knight's extreme astonishment revealed the well-known features of Master Ambrose Kirby.

"You here, my friend—and at such an hour!" he exclaimed. "And I hear not long ago emerged from this terrible sickness. In Heaven's name what does it mean?"

Ambrose seated himself, the signs of agitation betraying themselves in his strong homely face.

"No one can hear us?" he said cautiously.

"Not a soul; the household are all in bed; not one wakes within but myself."

"My tidings are for your ears alone. An hour ago came into Baignton as usual the courier from the South, carrying such news as I hardly dare repeat. You are aware that this courier comes always to my house. He had come straight through from London, spreading the news right and left as he rode, and, thank God, he was so exhausted that I secured his mails and turned the key on him in his chamber so as to allow me this night at least in which to act. There has been a discovery of an awful plot in London to destroy our gracious King and his Parliament at one fell blow!"

"Great Heaven!"

"By the mercy of God it was discovered in time, and the ring-

leaders were betrayed—Catesby, Percy, Sir Everard Digby and others."

Ralph groaned as he heard the well-known Papist names. "Go on, go on!" he cried.

"Under the Houses of Parliament my Lord Suffolk, sent by the King himself (God save him), discovered piles of fagots and wood, and one Guy or Guido Fawkes, who had received the commission to do the deed; the fagots concealed barrels of gunpowder. Fawkes was taken red-handed and confessed the whole plot, and it seems gave up the names of these gentlemen."

"Are they taken?"

"Aye, caught like rats in a trap. They took refuge in some old house in Warwickshire prepared to stand a siege, and there Heaven's vengeance followed them, whether by treachery or accident none can tell, but the gunpowder caught fire. Those that are not dead are hideously mangled."

"Ah!" exclaimed Ralph. "These are heavy tidings; but thank God the king is safe!"

Ambrose drew a long breath. "Sir Ralph," he said earnestly, "we must lose no time. To-night I have locked up this messenger, but with morning light the tidings will spread like wild-fire. I cannot stop it. As he passed along, the courier tells me, spreading his news, the people rose up in wild fury against the Papists; for mind you! we cannot hide from ourselves the meaning of this outrage. It is a popish plot; and here in Baignton the feeling just now is so lawless and unmanageable that every known and suspected Papist will be in the greatest danger unless we can at once take strong precautions. Hark! some one is coming!"

Sir Ralph looked up and started, for there at the foot of the stairs with a candle in his hand, stood his cousin. He had hastily dressed himself and drawn a fur-lined cloak about him, and he stood leaning against the wall breathing with difficulty, and now that his unwonted effort had been made, scarcely able to go further.

Ralph went hastily to him, and supported him to the fire; he placed him on the oaken settle, heaping a rug over him and stirring up the logs.

"This is utter madness," he exclaimed. "Harry, Harry, you should not have done it! Here, drink this!" and he fetched from the buffet a cup of wine and made him drink it, tending him as his own mother would have done, until the colour came back to his lips, and warmth to his hand, and he was able to look up and smile.

"I could not help it," he said slowly. "I heard your summons, and the fancy seized upon me with a force that I could not resist, that some danger threatened you and Nell. Ah, if it be so, for God's sake, shut me not out from your counsels! Speak, Master Kirby! Am I not right?"

"You are right, but you look not fit for such gear," said Ambrose earnestly.

"Think not of that, I beseech you," said Harry. "Suspense were worse for me than any evil news. Tell me all!"

Ambrose repeated his tale briefly without comment.

"The state of feeling in Baignton, then, is very violent," said Harry. "Is it directed against any known persons?"

Ambrose hesitated for a moment, then brought down his hand sharply on the table beside him.

"This is no time for concealment," he said. "A great deal of popular feeling is aroused against young Lady Stourton because of the traditions of Kettering Mere and of her mother, Mistress Annora Miles, whom heaven forgive!"

Sir Ralph grew white with rage.

"They dare?" he exclaimed.

"Men under the influence of sickness and misfortune are not reasonable," said Ambrose; "and in this case foul scandal-mongers have been at work. Sir Ralph, your gentle lady by her very deeds of charity and healing hath made most deadly enemies, and now, upon this, comes this tale of this accursed Popish plot, and the two together, I greatly fear, will madden the people."

"What will they do?" said Harry.

"Already they have urged upon our principal townfolk to demand that my lady should appear before the magistrates to clear herself from the charge of witchcraft. The case is too urgent—I cannot choose my words."

A fierce oath burst from the young knight's lips; his hand was on his sword.

"They shall answer to me for this! The insolent hounds!" he cried.

"Meanwhile," went on Ambrose, "I fear, when this news gets about, an outbreak of mob-violence. Some means must be taken, and at once. My lady should be moved to a place of safety."

"Never!" cried Ralph. "They may come, and I will shoot them down man by man as they advance."

"Alas, Ralph," said Harry, "we cannot deal thus with the matter! We cannot kill them—these miserable knaves, rather—for the sake of peace let us send Nell to those wonderful hiding-places on the Mere, of which we wot so well."

"Too late!" said Ambrose gloomily. "Some traitor must exist in the Papist lines; but yesterday Gurdon showed me a plan of the Mere with all the hiding-places marked in red. Among them, I believe, some miserable wretch has been tortured into confession."

"The soldiers? A company is quartered at Newington. I can send for them."

"Aye, but I asked that question first and the courier told me that the soldiers from Newington were sent off at once to St. Thomas

Lavenham—where riots have already begun—twelve miles from here. At Newington there were already complaints. It would take long to ride to St. Thomas Lavenham to-night."

"Then will I barricade the Castle, and with my own servants keep the mob at bay."

"Are they all faithful? I would warn you, my good Sir Ralph, that some of your own household have done more to spread foul slander than any in Bainton itself."

Harry spoke suddenly.

"Ralph," he said, "let us think this over quietly. It is but an outcome of a popular panic. It will pass away; but while it lasts, it must, of course, be dangerous. Would it not be better if dear Nell were safely out of the place for a little while? I see from Master Kirby's looks that some scheme is in his mind. Let us weigh it well. Bethink you what it would mean! A fight with your own vassals and dependants—a fierce fight, for I grant you the insult is intolerable and could only lead to bloodshed. It means a breach with all here, so great that I doubt me whether it could ever be healed. Nay, rather let us see whether a little prudence will not lead to peace."

"You have spoken well and generously, sir," cried Ambrose, "and oh, Sir Ralph, I beseech you to listen and yield! My scheme is this—for it is true that I have made a plan which needs but your consent to carry out—one of my merchant-ships laden with goods now lies outside the village of Ketterside some half a mile out at sea. A fisherman and his men have been warned that some passengers will be on the spot at any hour of this night or early morning, and that he is to wait for them on the jetty and take them out to the *Nancy*. She will sail on the morning-tide for Holland. If you have not gold enough in the house, forgive me that I have brought some with me, for my lady and her attendants will need gold when they land."

"None but myself shall accompany her," said Ralph gloomily, for the idea of flight was still hateful to him.

Ambrose hesitated a moment.

"Will that not greatly add to the danger? But let that pass; let us consider first of all how escape can best be accomplished. You are, of course, aware, Sir Ralph, that to-night your kinswoman, Mistress Isobel, lies at my mother's house?"

"Isobel—impossible! She is here and has not left her chamber all day. Yesterday Dr. Gurdon visited her and advised quiet and complete seclusion."

"Nevertheless it is true," said Ambrose, astonished. "She returned to Bainton with Gurdon yesterday and condescended to ask hospitality of my mother for herself and her woman."

"She knew nought of the news from London?" said Harry, leaning forward anxiously.

Ambrose's face was full of care.

"I fear me that she heard the news. She and Dr. Abraham Burnside were our guests when the man was ushered in. He is safe as his own church, and she, surely, surely she can be trusted. She herself agreed with me that to lock up the courier for the night would save us time."

"There is not one moment to lose!" exclaimed Harry. "Ralph, I beseech you, fly and bid Nell be ready; your mother also must rise. You, Ralph, must stay here to cover her flight. I cannot fight; my strength will not avail; but I will take Nell to the coast if you think well. Only, in heaven's name, delay not now for argument!"

"God bless you, Hal; you will never fail me. Now for the horses—whom can I trust?"

"Stubborn Joe; he would die for you both. I will call him. Nay, I must preserve my strength. Women surely will be safe. Dispatch old Goody to bid him saddle at once."

Ralph dashed upstairs and Ambrose turned to Harry. "You know the way, young sir?" he nodded. "You will find Ben Jonas the waterman waiting with his boat at the stone jetty just beyond the village; the tide may not have risen high enough, but Ben and his men will carry the lady out to the boat, and you may trust them. And now for you, will you not make some preparation also? The night is bitter cold, and you will have five miles to ride."

"I must preserve my strength," Harry repeated; "and, as I have been ill of late, stairs do try my chest. Good Kirby, if indeed you would do my errands I would thank you from my heart!"

"Right willingly."

A moment after obeying Harry's directions, Ambrose brought down from his room his long riding-boots, a warm woollen doublet, sword, baldric and pistols. When Harry tried to draw on the long riding-boots he could not do it.

"After all," he said, desisting from the fruitless attempt. "They are heavy and would impede my movements. What shall I do?"

Ambrose was stripping off the tanned leather buskins from his own legs exposing his thick woollen hose and spurred boots. "See," he said. "These will serve your purpose, and lighter shoes will serve underfoot."

"I cannot thank you for all your kindness, Kirby!" said Harry in his own wondrously winning fashion.

"There is no need or time for thanks," said Kirby gruffly. "To serve one who— You at least, young sir, will not now chide my presumption. I too loved her. Well, well, so our sweet lady reach the coast of Holland unscathed, naught else matters!"

Harry put out his hand silently and wrung that of his companion. For a moment the strong touch of sympathy almost unmanned good Ambrose, then he turned his thoughts abruptly to the exigencies of the moment. "So you trust not Mistress Isobel?" he said.

"She is utterly without mercy or honour," cried Harry bitterly.

"Even now all you have done may be—nay—has been, frustrated by her!"

"Oh, why tarry they so long?" cried Ambrose passionately. "I dared not tell Sir Ralph the utmost truth! The mob in Bainton is mad! It needs but the match to set the train on fire, and the news of this foul plot will do it! Why tarry they so long? I tell you that last night they were shouting in the streets, 'Burn her! Seize her! Hang the witch!' and the fierce rioters were carrying that incarnate fiend the witch-finder through the market-place. The riot will break out when this morning dawns." He stopped, for Sir Ralph came rapidly down the stairs followed by his wife and his mother. Nell wore her travelling cloak and hood, and in her arms holding him fast until the last moment should come, she carried her little child. The mother with a white scared face clung to her.

"Are the horses ready?" said Harry hoarsely. "We have no time to lose!"

"It is too late!" cried Ambrose, for from without rose suddenly, violently, an appalling sound, the great roar of an ungovernable mob, shouts, yells and screams of fury as if hell itself were let loose.

The women clung to each other; the men sprang to the door seeing to the bolts and bars already closed for the night. There was a tremendous crash of glass as a heavy stone went through the window, and the sound rose higher and fiercer as the roar of the sea waxes louder when the tide rolls in.

Shrieks and screams rang through the house, men and maids rushed into the hall, terrified and half-dressed, and the din outside grew ever more furious as the rioters began to batter the door with violent blows.

"Ralph," said Harry hastily, "where did you tell Joe to stand with the horses?"

"At the kitchen door in the court-yard."

"I think the mob is all in front of the house now, they are evidently without organisation," said Harry. "Shall we strive to get out through the kitchens?"

"I cannot fly," cried Ralph in an agony. "I must defend the Castle and cover your flight! Take her, Hal! Go!"

"I will take her," said Harry. "Nell, come with me! You hear? It is you whom they seek, but I will secure your safety. For their dear sakes," and he pointed to her husband and his mother. "You must not hesitate but come at once!"

"For their sakes? Oh, Ralph!" the words burst from her lips like a cry.

They turned away not to witness the anguish of that parting. Then Lady Stourton took the little child from Nell and clasped it to her breast. "God keep you, my own child!" she cried.

"I am ready," panted poor Nell.



Harry went first, leading the way, a strange strength upheld him. On they hurried through the deserted kitchens, for all the terrified household had rushed together into the hall. On without a moment's pause until they reached the door and found Joe waiting for them with the horses.

Harry's conjecture proved to be right, the mob were all assembled in front of the Castle. In their fury the attack was frantic and totally without method.

Joe placed Nell on her horse. Harry mounted silently. They rode out of the court and into the plantations at the back of the Castle. Leading Nell's horse by the bridle for a time, Harry kept under the cover of the ornamental trees of the pleasance, till presently, still perilously near the hindmost stragglers of the mob, they emerged on to the high road. And here both simultaneously broke into a gallop, and rode for their lives, leaving behind them the hideous shouts and yells of the rioters.

Meanwhile the assault on the door of the Castle grew ever more and more violent. Every window in the hall was broken, and lighted torches and heavy stones were thrown in from without, so that the terrified servants had to keep incessantly on the alert to quench all that caught fire, and avoid the missiles. At length there was a pause, as if the fierce foe were consulting.

"Some one there is among them who is now assuming the position of leader," whispered Ambrose. "In that lies the danger. Were it not well to send all the women up-stairs? We are too few to dispute the full width of this great hall, but we could defend the staircase to the last.

"You are right. At the first sign of the door giving, we will retreat and make our stand at the foot of the stairs," said Ralph, and he rapidly gave his orders, assigning to each terrified servant his place.

Suddenly there came a tremendous crash, the mob had among them raised the trunk of a young tree and used it as a battering ram. The stout oak door quivered from head to foot. Another furious onslaught!

"It gives! it gives!" exclaimed Ralph. "In another moment they will be upon us! Mother, up the stairs! For Heaven's sake hinder us not!"

In those days women obeyed rapidly and without question. She gathered her women together and they mounted the stairs.

Another tremendous blow and the great oak door fell, with its weight dragging chains and bolts from their staples, and in the aperture, foremost of the yelling rioters, stood a gigantic blacksmith with a pike in his hand.

"Give us up the witch!" he yelled. "We will but put her to the test. Down with Popery! Down with Popery! She shall choose whether she burn or hang!"

The words died on his lips, for without further hesitation Ralph fired, and with a roar like that of a mad bull the man fell heavily back.

There was a moment's horrified pause, then all burst forward again. Some foremost ones caught and entangled in the chains and débris of the door fell prone, and those behind pitched headlong over them. One crowded in upon another till it seemed as if the mob drove in over a writhing mass of bodies.

Step by step the little band retreated to the foot of the stairs, and there, so resolute, so formidable did they look, that the howling crowd snarled and stormed without daring to advance, as one may see the hounds hold back from a stag at bay.

Maddened with excitement one man made a rush; the bullet caught him in the chest. With a yell he sprang into the air and fell doubled up dead among his comrades.

"Down upon them! Give us the witch! The witch!"

"Hold firm!" shouted Ralph. "Now for it!"

The whole crowd burst upon them with an overpowering rush, and they found themselves fighting hand to hand.

Yells from the wounded filled the air, the thick smoke from wildly-waving torches obscured the scene. They pressed on and on, and inch by inch the few gallant men were forced backwards up the stairs.

"There goes my last charge," muttered Ambrose, as he fired his pistol into the crowd, and took his huge iron-hilted sword in both hands.

At this moment a tremendous blow from a pike brought Ralph to his knee, but he was up again, and the black hand of the man who had struck it was laid low by the sweep of Ambrose's great sword.

Yet inch by inch they were forced backwards, and now their powder was exhausted and the weight of numbers was beginning to tell inexorably. Then suddenly, quite suddenly, above the furious din came a ringing sound which rose high over the fierce frenzy of shouts and yells. The sound of the gallop of mounted men, the clang of armour, the crack of firearms! Then a roar of terror and execration.

The little band heard and took courage.

"The soldiers!" some one shouted. "A Stourton! a Stourton! to the rescue!"

Then the assailants in front fell back, and those behind pressed forward, driven by the relentless force of a little band of half-a-dozen soldiers led on by no less a guide than Dr. Abraham Burnside himself.

Heavily armed with swords and pikes and the long horse-pistols which they had already discharged, the soldiers broke through the rioters.

Sir Ralph and his men, seeing their rescuers, charged down through the mob, reaching the soldiers as the terrified rioters fled right and left, cringing and twisting themselves to avoid the heavy pikes now half carelessly wielded by the troopers.

"Only just in time," exclaimed the officer in command, taking off his helmet. "We have ridden hard. Only tell me—are the ladies safe?"

"Aye, safe, thank God—and thank you, my brave friends!" said Ambrose. Ralph could not yet command his voice. He was spent and breathless from the tremendous force of the struggle.

"My Lady Stourton, whom the people call the Lady Moon?" said the officer in a low voice.

"She hath escaped," said Ambrose, "under the escort of a kinsman of the family."

"And I," said Ralph, recovering his breath with a gasp, "must at once and without an instant's pause go in pursuit of her. My task here is over. You, gentlemen, will protect my mother and my child. All will be well. I must off."

They strove not to detain him, save to press upon him freshly-loaded pistols and a sword not hacked into the semblance of a saw. He went out to the stables, saddled his fleetest horse and galloped away, swift as the wind.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

AFTER Nell and Harry had emerged from the shelter of the woods and had put their horses into a gallop, they neither of them spoke. The curious self-command with which Harry had said twice before, "I must preserve my strength," still governed him. They rode on for awhile in perfect silence.

The wild din of the mob had long died away in the distance, and they found themselves crossing a wide tract of flat country, unsheltered by hedge or trees, flooded by a sheet of moonlight. It was very still and cold. Both slackened their speed at last, and Harry was the first to break the silence.

"Nell," he said, "dear Nell."

She looked at him; her sorrowful little face and large frightened eyes went to his heart.

"Nell, we may go a little more slowly now. We have ridden half the way and may spare ourselves and our horses. Keep up your heart, sweet coz, all will be well. This outbreak will soon be over, and will in no way endanger those we have left behind. They will but cover our flight."

"But, Harry," said Nell tremulously, "you are so weak and still so unfit for exertion. Oh, tell me, how fares it with you?"

"Wondrously well," he answered brightly. "Surely strength for our sore need has come to me and will last, Nell, I know, until you are in safety."

She did not hear the last sentence which he spoke under his breath, and she looked up somewhat reassured.

"All passed in such fearful haste," she said. "Tell me, where are

we going? I know many safe hiding-places on the Mere, yet are our horses' heads not turned that way."

"Alas, they are all betrayed—there has been treachery!"

He told her of the news from London, news which gave her so appalling a shock that she could scarcely restrain her tears.

"We go to Ketterside," he said presently, when he perceived that she was able to listen. "At the stone jetty there beyond the town we shall find a fisherman, Ben Jonas by name."

"I know him; he is one of us and most trustworthy," said Nell.

"That is well. He and his men have orders to take you out to Master Ambrose Kirby's vessel in their fishing-boat. She, the merchant-vessel, lies waiting for the rise of the tide to sail for Holland."

"Ah," said Nell sorrowfully, "I shall find one friend already in exile there!"

"Your uncle?"

She looked startled.

"Nay, he is in hiding somewhere on the coast. Doubtless he has been warned. The danger to him would be ten-fold; but the fisherfolk of Ketterside belong to us, and that Master Kirby knows."

She paused a moment and then said:

"And you, Harry?"

"Think not of me," he answered gently. "When you are safe, all will be well with me. I shall go back in the morning. Ralph, should he be able to arrange matters quietly at the Castle, will follow you. Maybe he will even be in time to sail with you on the first tide to-morrow. Shall we move on faster now?"

An instinct moved Harry to quicken their pace, for even as he spoke an intolerable pain burned in his chest. He must on, on, and two miles yet lay between Nell and safety.

They rode faster.

"Wrap your mantle round you, Hal; it is bitterly cold," said Nell presently.

He nodded, but did not obey; rather he threw it wide, needing air.

"Harry, Harry," she cried presently, "this will kill you! Turn back, I beseech you! I can find my way alone."

He pointed onward. Speech was torture to him; but he spoke.

"We are nearly there, sweet Nell."

Could he keep his saddle? At times it seemed as if he required a tremendous effort to keep upright, to hold the heavy reins of the docile horse. Then again it seemed as though he were up-borne by wings strong and unyielding, his eyes were full of light, his ears of heavenly music.

Nell spoke no more; a deadly terror for him was upon her. It seemed best to press on to their goal.

"It is for their sakes! My God, give him strength! It is for their dear sakes!" she prayed.

At last they descended a sharp stony hill and entered the rough uneven street of Ketterside. The horses' feet made a strange clatter as they paced through, and heads of honest fisher-folk looked out and were drawn in again. They passed down the street, out of the village, over a long sandy dune, and then drew rein at their trysting-place, the stone jetty.

Before them lay the great expanse of the restless sea. Overhead the white moon rode through a purple sky and threw a shimmering pathway from the far horizon even to their feet. Across this pathway a brown fishing-boat lay, her great amber-coloured sails rolled up and her cordage black and intricate against the sky.

The tide was some way out and little waves washed whisperingly on the dark wet sand. On the low sea-wall of the jetty, which was roughly constructed of great hewn stones, sat a small group of persons awaiting their arrival.

Silently they gathered round them as they rode up. Some one lifted Nell from her horse and with a little cry of untold relief and thankfulness she found herself in the arms of her uncle, Father Johnstone, while her old nurse Rachel, disguised in a huge peasant-woman's cloak, clasped her child to her bosom, sobbing out her thanks to God.

The strange feeling of supernatural strength still bore up Harry, as he dismounted from his horse, and fastened the two bridles to a post on the jetty.

"This is well!" he exclaimed as his hand was grasped in that of the priest. "You go with her? Then shall I indeed give up my charge with confidence and thankfulness. See, father, this purse of gold. It will serve you till Ralph Stourton join you. Go, delay not, the fishermen wait to carry you out to the boat. I beseech you delay not."

An almost frantic longing for their departure, for all to be over, was upon him. The intolerable anguish of suffering was increasing. Would they but go!

"You come not then with us?" said the priest glancing keenly into his face with kind experienced eyes.

"Nay, I have another duty. For God's sake go!" He held out his hand. Father Johnstone took it in both his, the quick fervent blessing faltered on his lips, the unwonted tears rushed to his stern eyes. He turned and went down hastily to the sea.

One of the fishermen took up old Rachel in his arms. The sturdy priest took a long staff and waded out after them.

Nell lingered yet. The fisherman waiting to carry her, turned his back and looked out to sea. The waves came softly whispering up the sand.

"Harry," she said—"dear Harry!" She put her arms round his neck. "Farewell, dear brother!" she said.

He bent down and kissed her soft brow.

"Farewell, Harry, farewell!" she murmured.

He sat down on the wet stones of the jetty, leaning back against the low sea-wall, and watched her go.

All need for exertion was over now; he might rest at last. He sat dreamily watching. He saw how they reached the boat. He heard the sailors' "ahoy" as they shook out the great brown sails. A little wind came shimmering over the sea and filled them, so that swiftly and gracefully she glided forward, tacked, and put out to sea.

They were gone.

Harry lay back against the wall. With a feeble hand he unfastened his doublet at the throat, for his breath came heavily and slow. They were gone, her safety was assured, and now he might rest. The pathway of light on the dark sea shimmered and glistened before him, the rise and fall of the waves made a soft monotonous music like that of a lullaby.

Gradually the terrible pain in his breast became less, a numbness crept over him, a sense of unutterable peace. The horses champed restlessly and stamped from side to side; they were cold; but sounds no longer reached his ears. For one moment a terrible sense of loss and utter loneliness came over him. The human shrinking from facing that which was coming with no loving hand to hold his to the last. He would fain have whispered "mother" as he had done on that day when her gentle care had brought him back from the threshold of the grave, but now his lips could not frame the words. That sense of awful solitude passed over him with a sharp thrill of fear, and then—then there came to him other help than ours, and when the moonlight shone full on the young dead face, there was upon it so heavenly a smile that none could doubt the fulfilment of that promise: "When thou pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will be with thee."

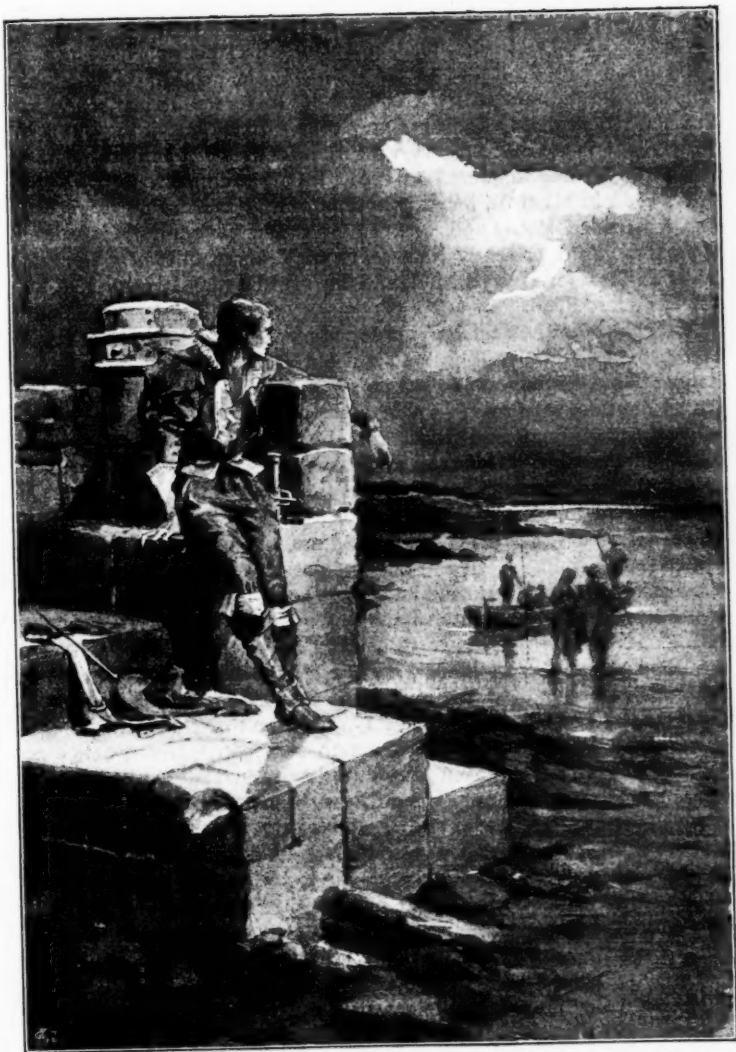
### CHAPTER XXX.

THE cold chill of early dawn had passed over the world, the tide was at the full, the great grey waves falling with a dirge-like force on the sands. The clattering sound of flying hoofs broke the silence, and the sea-birds whirled and swooped on the crests of the waves.

Ralph Stourton, covered with dust and blood, his clothes torn, the foam flying from his horse's bit, galloped down to the sea. The horses, still tied up to the post on the jetty, snorted and whinnied with cold and impatience; but he heeded them not. He had caught sight of something which made his heart stand still with fear.

Ralph leaped from his horse, leaving him to his own devices, and rushed forward. With a cry he threw himself on his knees by Harry's motionless form and passionately implored him to speak, to look up.





ALL NEED FOR EXERTION WAS NOW OVER ; HE MIGHT REST AT LAST.

He rubbed the ice-cold hands, he felt for the beating of the heart, in vain, and despair seized on him.

"Harry, Harry, look up!" he cried in broken words. "Oh, Harry, do not die like this! For her sake, Hal; for my sake! You have never failed us, Hal! Oh, God, make him open his eyes!"

But the young dead face in its ineffable calm seemed to bid him stop the wild outburst of his grief and let him go where, after life, is rest. After awhile, through the grey cold mist of early morning, the fishing-boat came back laden with the spoils of the night. The fishermen landing wondered to see the young knight with the dead man's head in his arms, bending over him in utter sorrow.

They landed slowly and with kindly clatter to warn him of their approach. And presently he rose, took off his mantle, of which he made a pillow for Harry's head, and laying him tenderly upon it, he came towards them.

They told him how all had happened; and to Sir Ralph the relief of hearing that Father Johnstone and old Rachel were with Nell was indescribable, for he was too late to sail in the *Nancy*; she had put to sea on the tide.

He learned from Ben Jonas that he owed this comfort to Dr. Abraham Burnside. The good man, as Ambrose Kirby had informed him, had been present when the news from London had arrived, and he, a man of much sharper wit than Kirby, at once determined that Isobel would act the part of traitor and must be circumvented.

Before Kirby had been five minutes out of the house, Isobel had disappeared and Dr. Burnside had taken action. He was fully aware of the temper of the Baignton roughs, and that all was ripe for a riot. He at once sent a messenger to Ketterside, where he believed that the good priest was in hiding, and then himself rode as fast as he could ride to summon the soldiers from St. Thomas Lavenham. Most fortunately he had but half the distance to ride, for he fell in with a small party on their way back to Newington, from whence a message of distress had been sent, and they turned aside with him at once to the scene of the most immediate danger.

Aided by the fishermen, Sir Ralph carried the body of Harry Stourton to the house of Ben Jonas in Ketterside, there to await till all due honour could be done.

There, persuaded by the rough, kindly fisherfolk, Ralph re-adjusted his dress, and throwing himself on a hard bed belonging to one of them, slept from sheer exhaustion until the sun was high in the heavens.

The return of the young knight that day to Stourton Castle with the sad little procession was miserably melancholy. Lady Stourton, who had been warned by a messenger sent forward early, met them with all the deep sorrow of a mother's loss of a beloved son. It was long before she was able to find comfort. The aspect of the Castle, the shattered door and windows—the débris and horrible signs of

sharp fighting were hardly yet removed, and women were busy tending the wounded and laying out the dead.

Ralph felt that in her enforced exile his young wife had really been spared much. For many weeks he was unable to follow Nell to Holland, owing to the pressing necessity of his presence at home, and his feeling of security that under the care of Father Johnstone she was safe and tenderly cared for.

After the fierce outbreak of riots in Bainton matters cooled down. A few stern examples were made; but apart from the administration of justice a lesson not easily forgotten had been given. The resolute force with which their large numbers had been first held in check, and then dispersed by a mere handful of disciplined men, had a strong effect, and brought disorganised public feeling once more under the control of law and order.

The witch-finder disappeared from the country, and Dr. Burnside preached so powerful and uncompromising a sermon on the iniquity of superstition and the crimes to which it led that a sheepish feeling of shame prevailed on the subject.

Several men had been severely wounded and three killed in the riot, and it had a strangely softening effect on the people to find that the widows and orphans and the wounded were treated with the same care and almsgiving from the Castle as had always been the case with those who had suffered in a worthier cause.

After a time came the news from London that the King in every way repressed and discouraged reprisals against his Roman Catholic subjects, and furthermore proclaimed that such transgressions against the peace should be severely punished.

Isobel fled from the shelter of old Mistress Kirby's roof, and for a time no one heard anything of her. Sir Ralph would not suffer her name to be mentioned in the Castle; but Lady Stourton, in spite of her horror of her cruel treachery, yearned to hear at least of her safety.

At length one day a message was brought to Lady Stourton, who was at the time living a lonely life at the Castle with the baby Michael only for her companion. The message came from Isobel, praying her to receive her niece.

For one moment she hesitated, trembling at the thought of seeing one whose actions had been so relentless and so cruel. Then mercy conquered, and she bade the servants usher her in.

Isobel came forward impetuously, throwing back the black hood she wore, and showing her face, grown thin and haggard, her brilliant beauty utterly faded and gone.

Her aunt took her into her arms.

"Isobel, you have sinned grievously!" she cried. "But if indeed you do repent, come to me, my child, and I will comfort you."

"Harry is dead," said Isobel. "What killed him?"

"The leech tells us that the action of the heart failed from over-exertion," faltered Lady Stourton, unable yet to speak that beloved name calmly.

"I killed him!" said Isobel hoarsely. "And for that my whole life shall be spent in atonement. I have come to bid you farewell, for I go to London to join the Community of Grey Sisters there, who spend their lives in tending the sick and poor."

"Child, child, your sin was not against our Harry—and that he himself would have been the first to say—but against Ralph's fair young wife."

"For that," cried Isobel, "I do not, and I never shall repent! The woman who destroyed my life to my dying day shall I call an unholy thing—yes, in truth, a witch!"

"Isobel, this is indeed madness."

"Tell me, where is Ralph? I would fain bid him farewell."

"That may not be," said Lady Stourton gravely. "I will tell you plainly that his horror of you is such that he has forbidden the utterance even of your name in this house."

"That is her doing," said Isobel, turning yet more ghastly pale. "Yet will I see him and all will be well."

"You cannot see him, Isobel. Ralph sailed for Holland ten days since, and now that peace is established, will bring home his wife."

Isobel was silent. The shock of disappointment made her feel sick and cold. She bit her white lips till the blood came. Then she suddenly looked up with desolate, hollow eyes, saying:

"I loved him! I loved him well!"

"God keep us from such love!" said Lady Stourton, with a shudder, for she knew what it had cost them all.

Isobel said no more. She drew her hood round her, and without kiss or further greeting went away, and never again did her footsteps cross the threshold of Stourton Castle.

The long years passed on. In all fair England no *châtelaine* was ever more loved and honoured than Nell Stourton, whom still the people often in love would call my Lady Moon.

A fair chapel of beautiful design was built by the young knight and dedicated to the memory of his beloved kinsman. In a sculptured recess overhung by a rich canopy, lay a recumbent effigy in marble white as snow. It was so beautiful that men came from far and near to look upon it. It represented a man still in the early years of youth. The sculptor had himself known and loved Harry well, and he had understood how to carve the marvellous beauty of that young face, with the hollow cheek and eyelid of one wasted by illness. The slender hands were crossed upon his breast.

Nell would kneel there with her children by her side and tell them the story of his short life, and bid them strive to be what he had been—perfect in arms, perfect in minstrelsy, a very gentle peace-maker, and, most perfect of all, in sacrifice.

## PROXIMA THULE.

I STARTED from Liverpool in August, 1896, by s.s. *Brenda*, bound for Stornoway and Thurso, carrying cargo and passengers.

I left with "all the dispositions in the world," like Sterne's valet La Fleur, for a Sentimental Journey to the Land of Scott and Ossian. By "sentiment" I mean just that touch of human interest which sometimes enlivens the details of travel; when voyagers pace the deck and talk as if they were not acquaintances of yesterday; when juxtaposition weakens the fences set up by age, sex, and station, and we seem for a time to be kin and to understand each other's language. It soon passes; but it is real while it lasts.

But there was little promise of sentiment on board beyond that of remembered poems and romances. When I looked round I saw no material. Dr. Primrose might have found some fellow prisoners with whom to make acquaintance. Sterne would have made friends with everybody. John Wesley would have preached a sermon on deck. Professor Blackie would have danced a fling. As for me, I sat apart and looked on, hoping for occasion.

It never came. A sprinkling of Scotchmen, and a good many business men from Liverpool and Manchester, with their wives and families, formed the bulk of the passengers. They ate and drank whisky, they played deck billiards and peg quoits, smoked much, read *Tit-Bits*, *Answers*, *Pearson's Weekly* and the like, enjoyed wholesome idleness, talk, and laughter. I was glad that they were in good spirits; but I did not wish to join them, nor did they ask me. Most of them did not seem to look at sea or sky or islands. Why did they come to sea, then? What did they expect to find? They could read *Answers* more cheaply at home, and they could find the relaxation they want at Blackpool or Scarborough.

I found no place in such a crowd: the worse for me, I dare say. It is well to be able to say "homo sum" in any company; but it is certainly easier to get on with Devonshire clowns and Highland gillies, than with these unnatural children of the town. They seem to me like hermit-crabs which have left their old shell and are only on their way to a new one. They have cast off the old traditions and not put on the new culture, forgotten their old stay-at-home ways and not learnt how to travel from home.

Amongst all these fellow-creatures there was only one whose voice caught my ear with a pleasant accent; but she was fenced about with relations, and I did not get speech of her. I heard her say "she was just dying to be at home." The voice had musical intervals and soft Celtic intonations, unlike the hard bargaining see-saw of the Lowland

Scots. The Highland language may be said to be like Italian, a "tongue of Yes," and the Lowland a "tongue of No." And as their speech, so the Lowland faces are like the Decalogue: "Thou shalt not," is written upon the long upper lip, the corners of the mouth drawn down at an angle of negation, in the cold, sensible, grey eyes, the honest brow, behind which are no jokes or fine shades. Here is a specimen of conversation. "Ye tak' saut to your porridge? Saut should be put in in the making. It does na mix well after." "Porridge makes a good foundation." "I was just about to make the same remark." From which I conclude that the Scots are a people of formulas: that is, a people who have made up their minds, and have not to go looking about for their opinions in a fog of sentiment. It is easy to guess why Scotland has always furnished the head to the British pioneering axe.

In short, man delighted me not, nor woman neither; and I took out my little brown calf volume of Sterne, and read with much contentment the first volume, as far as where the little *bidet* kicks La Fleur out of his jack-boots on to the road. And here I fared as La Fleur, for on opening Volume 2, I found it was Volume 2 of Yorick's Sermons—full, I dare say, of the same half-sincere moralising, and anti-Popery stuff, which bores me in the sermon read by Corporal Trim. I did not care to read them.

So, for the most part of my short voyage, I did without books or companions, and enjoyed sea, sky and land, and the pathetic fallacy.

When I rose from the uneasy red-plush drawer which they call a berth, got through the squalid process of dressing—and went on deck, I found the sunlight sparkling and dancing as it only does at sea. We were passing the Mull of Cantyre; Ailsa Craig stood from the distant sea like an Odyssean Island, and far away on the left a cliff standing straight up from the western horizon marked the nearest corner of Ireland. The level brine was as blue as the Mediterranean, though of a different and more Atlantic hue. The land was veiled with a light summer haze. The sky was unclouded. The craft we met had all sail spread to the light breeze. It was a day for Rosabelle or the Maid of Norroway to cross the seas. Sir Patrick Spens would have put out without thought of the moon, old or young; the Ancient Mariner would have had no thought of coming to harm: and Edward Bruce would only have wished for a fresher breeze from Ben-na-darch to make the cords and canvas strain. I never saw the sea so alive with birds. Long lines of bold gannets winged their strong flight as if bent on a serious purpose; gulls of all colours and sizes tumbled in the air, or dropped down upon some prize thrown out from the cook's galley, or wailed and laughed as they followed astern; lovely, poetical creatures, wheeling, poising and fluttering in the most beautiful curves; but quarrelling for nothing, impelled by sordid appetites, with little more intellect than a herring. Black and white guillemots in pairs rocked themselves on the sea, poking out inquisitive noses,



or stood on end and flapped their wings; puffins with large white faces and weak wings laboured through short flights; divers amused themselves by seeing how long they could stay down and how far off they could come up; unsocial cormorants hurried along, sea-swallows—halcyons they are said to be—hawked about with musical notes: only the petrel stayed at home and waited for foul weather.

If my eyes had been keener, or my glasses better, I should have seen deer ranging over the romantic hills, and seals or mermaids basking on the rocks.

How beautiful were the long lines of Islay and the noble Paps of Jura, like a larger Eildon in the west, and sacred to the same Rhymer as Eildon. I thought of the Rhymer and his simple language, his imagery returning on itself, cloud and mountain, sea and sky, as easy and natural as Homer's; and of poor forgotten Ossian, his mists and moorlands, lilies of the lake and roses of the brae, white-bosomed maids and stormy chieftains; and thought that his country was ungrateful to him. As Scott says, "the best things are the commonest." Scott, Wordsworth, and Tennyson do not need the exotic glories on which Byron's Muse subsisted, and if in Scotland—or shall we say *Scotland*? for he created it—we put the Rhymer on a higher poetical pedestal than down here in the south, does he not deserve more praise as a poet than the age accords him? We think too much of niceties and felicities of diction, and too little of loftiness of thought. I can believe that Scott may outlive Byron, a greater genius but a narrower heart. Then, too, who in passing by the shores of Assynt could forget the author of "Kidnapped," whom Scott, if he had lived, would have graciously acknowledged as a kinsman?

And as the ghosts came flitting up, *νεκύων ἀμεινὰ κάρηνα*, I saw Dr. Johnson, "a bulky man," mounted disproportionately on his "very low horse," a tolerant, humorous, observant, sententious rambler; and Flora Macdonald, "a woman of middle stature, soft features, gentle manners and elegant presence;" and Boswell, "whose gaiety of conversation and civility of manners" softened those of the noble old bear whom he led to his native shores; and the Hebridean chieftains who entertained them so courteously; and John Leyden, beloved of Scott, the singer of the Maid of Colonsay; and hosts of dour Macdonalds and Macleods, killing each other's deer, lifting each other's cattle, smoking whole families of enemies in caves merely for the crime of being called Mac this instead of Mac that: swift in wrath and patient in revenge, ready with dirk and claymore, vain and quarrelsome as game-cocks, faithful and courageous as collie dogs, simple and wily, honourable liars, honest thieves; Scott's Fergus and Conachar and Stevenson's Alan Brek the type of them all.

How noble they seemed compared with the town-bred product of civilisation. "Every Highland girl," says Johnson, "is a gentlewoman." Contentment with one's station makes the gentleman, and the wish to climb a little higher still makes the snob. Yet it is the

restless spirit of discontent which has made our empire. We carry our vulgarity all over the world, and justice and magnanimity go with it. The Highlander and the Irishman cannot do what we do; but they beat us in breeding.

We passed in the afternoon sunshine the shores of Eig and Muck and the romantic heights of Rum, a happy island which contains, it is said, the finest deer in Scotland, and two salmon rivers. It is true there are no foxes; but the Highland gentleman can do without foxes. Even from the sea it is as beautiful as Arran or Ægina, and I longed to sit in a gay galley and visit the seaward side and roam over its purple hills. For now, with the westerling light, deeper colour began to prevail, and the day's pageant ended with a train of crimson cloud and the long luminous twilight of the northern summer.

We anchored somewhere in the strait to the east of Skye. How grand was the view of the southern face of Skye, range behind range, peak behind peak of blue mountains! And the morning found us moving in a smooth green lake land-locked on every side. Greenness was everywhere; in the dark quiet water of the loch, and the woods reflected in it; greenness in the wooded hills sloping up from the shore into paler regions, where the wet mountain pastures gradually gave place to lonely deserts of grey rock. At the head of the fiord stood an Alpine peak half hidden in cloud, through which gleamed wet slabs of stone and a white torrent. It was so early that crofters and travellers were hardly awake. A boat put out from the shore, and a red shawl made a bright contrast to the green. A girl stood bareheaded waving adieu, and then sat idly on the wall that bordered the road. Smoke rose from the chimney of the ferryman's cottage; the day had begun. More travellers came hurrying down with their bundles; the boat put back to take them on board. The white plash and sound of the oars came nearer in the morning silence. The steamer, too, woke up, rattled its chains, and began to disgorge its merchandise.

Except for the noise of the engine and rattle of the chains, I do not find loading and unloading tedious. One sees something of the wants of a district, something of the people. Now loads of hay, almost haystacks, are swung up aloft and softly dipped on the pier. Now a couple of rams are driven up a steep board, who are no sooner on land than they rush upon each other, like Balin and Balan, to finish an old quarrel, or from mere cheerfulness and Celtic pugnacity. Now innumerable barrels of herrings, casks of petroleum, sacks of flour, bars of iron—for the most part the necessities, not the ornaments of life—are landed and carted away by grave men in homespun clothes, ignorant or sparing of English.

We steamed across to Stornoway against a strong head wind on a rough sea, in bright sunshine but no comfort. Merrily, merrily, bounded the bark, pitching like a porpoise and rolling like a dromedary, so that the deck was as steep as a roof and you saw the

blue and white water at your feet. They put up a sail to steady her but the wind made light of it and laughed it away in ribands, with merry cracks and rips. There was no danger, not much excitement or exhilaration, though waves were blue and sunlight brilliant; and I was glad when, salt and buffeted, I stepped on shore at the unromantic town of Stornoway—for the constitution of which town, its parliamentary representation, its laird and his castle, its fish-wives, home spinning wheels and handlooms, see *Black's Guide*; but do not see *Black's Princess of Thule*, unless you wish to be disappointed.

We came back to the mainland over a quieter and a moonlit sea, and cast anchor in one of the Ross-shire lochs, standing northwards at a leisurely hour on Sunday morning; for there was no cargo business on the Sabbath, and it mattered little at what time of day the ship dropped into Loch Erribol, east of Cape Wrath. There was no playing at deck games, and hilarity gave place to Sunday dulness. No service; but some amateurs gathered into a corner and sang Hymns Ancient and Modern. I hope the Sirens did not hear them, the sisters of the nymph of Corrievreckan, for surely they sing much better. The strong wind had become a moderate breeze, yet keeping recollection enough of yesterday to make us pitch a little in the swell: the sun was still bright, the barren mountain crests and dreamy islands incredibly varied with shadows of coursing clouds, the green touched to finer gradations as it melted into the blue and grey of the granite summits, the purple of the heather more ruddy, the glens bathed in deeper blue than under the hot sun of yesterday. As we passed by the brown bastion of Handa, *statio gratissima mergis*, thousands upon thousands of sea birds, startled by the firing of a gun, rose together into the air, hovered, burst and scattered in twinkling lights, like a bouquet of fireworks.

The pale afternoon was deepening towards the long August twilight, and I began to fear that I should have to round Cape Wrath and get what lodging I could, late at night, in some shepherd's cottage or small clachan on Lake Erribol. But here to help me came in the little bit of sentiment for which I had been waiting. The captain (good soul) would have liked to put me on shore where I asked to be set down, but scrupled about his owners' orders. Finding that there was a young lady on board who wished to see her relations at Balgourie, if only for a moment, he bent his duty to his feelings (as we all do, and often are none the worse for it), and decided to put in to Loch Scallach, a deepwater inlet guarded by innumerable islets, on which sit the cormorants like a company of preachers. So we made a bold sweep out of our course and steered in. The ship's boat was lowered, and into it stepped the lady of the Gaelic intonations. Her home, she told me, was on the northern coast, round Cape Wrath; but her sisters were staying at Balgourie, and she was just longing to see them. We were rowed in to a little quay, where stood two sisters waving handkerchiefs. There was an

embrace, a few words—ten seconds, she said, was all the captain granted. Then the boat went back, and there I stood with my luggage; marooned, it seemed, for no vehicle was in sight, and it was Sunday.

But kind hearts are found everywhere. The damsels looked on me as a kind of Mungo Park; and though they did not offer to grind corn for me, they invited me to their hospitable Manse and set tea and scones before me. By the time we reached the Manse we were old acquaintances, and when I left it we were friends. Again I heard the pretty Gaelic flutings, with sister-like variations of voice and manner. How delicate these Highlanders are; how genuine and well-bred and free from English stiffness and sheepishness. "Where was I going? How did I mean to get there? It was only three miles. Oh, but they must take me in the cart!" I protested, they insisted, and whilst I was protesting, one of them had slipped out and the cart was there. The Minister would have driven me himself any other day of the week; for the pony was not very sure-footed, and John was not to be trusted, and his niece was rather nervous. But he feared he would be "deposed" if his parishioners saw him driving on the Sabbath.

So Miss Kirstie drove me, and drove me skilfully, and was excellent company all the way. We passed the Free Kirk congregation, whom the pony for a moment seemed inclined to join, but was brought back to the Establishment by its young mistress. Well furnished were they with their own sins behind them, and their neighbours' in front, and the market-price of butter and cheese in their right hands. I met them again in an evening walk, having disburdened themselves of their own sins, and laid in, I daresay—they looked it—a fresh stock of those of their neighbours.

We passed the crofters' cottages, poor but clean and solid abodes, with thatched roofs covered with weighted nets; we saw the sun set among the islands, and passed between the little crofts set with green potatoes and greener oats, and pastures as full of flowers as in Switzerland, up stony roads, and into the embrace of noble mountains, till we stopped at the door of the inn, shook hands, and parted. I shall never see those kind folks again, but I like to record an act of genuine friendliness to a stranger. And if Miss Kirstie should happen to see these pages, I hope she will forgive the liberty I take in writing this, and accept the grateful thanks of the Southron wanderer.

C.

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## BETTY'S ANCESTOR.

BY MRS. WYNDHAM PAYNE-GALLWEY.

IN a private sitting-room at the Grand Hotel a fair-haired girl was poring over a budget of letters. She looked up with a smile at the entrance of a tall, good-looking man, who, subsiding on the sofa at her side, asked lazily:

"Well, Betty, what news from New York? How is that city supporting your absence?"

"Here's a long letter from mother, all about the pedigree that she is compiling. You might just run your eye over it, Cecil, and see what she wants. I don't feel like wading through it."

He glanced rather disconsolately down the closely written sheets, but obediently read on until he reached the following passage:

"My grandfather, Richard da Castro was born in 1811, and left England in 1832, after a quarrel with his father, caused by their rivalry for the hand of Miss Betty Spencer, who became my grandmother. Grandpapa never ceased to remember and speak of his early home, Elmwood Grange, which he described as a large and handsome mansion, situated at Lower Streathing, within no very great distance of London City. Now, dear Betty, the missing date in my pedigree is that of the death of my great-grandfather, Thomas da Castro, and you may be able to help me in the matter. He was born in 1790, and you will probably be able to find the date of his death in the parish registers; also to ascertain if he married again, and to whom he left his property, after disinheriting his only child.

"Grandpapa used to describe him as a tall, dark man, who always rode home, at least in his younger days, from his London office, across a lonesome heath, infested by highwaymen; both he and his hired man carried pistols in their belts, and had many narrow escapes.

"Will you spare a little time to make a pilgrimage to the spot, and find out whether the old da Castro house, the cradle of our race, yet stands? In a country where progress is as slow as in England, it is just possible that it may.

"Any information that you can obtain, my dear child, will be appreciated by

"Your affectionate mother,

"OLIVIA LINCOLN."

Betty's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"I'm quite willing to go at once," she cried energetically. "I

have had enough of society and stores, for the present. It sounds quite historical. Why, maybe, we shall find it a charming ivy-covered ruin! Let's start at once, Cecil."

"I'm sorry to damp your enthusiasm, my little wife, but I very much doubt if we shall find anything at all. In spite of your mother's low opinion of English progress, London has nearly doubled her size since 1832. She has drawn Lower Streathing into her meshes, and converted it from a village into a suburb. I expect that the 'cradle of your race' was pulled down long ago. However, we'll go, and make all the inquiries we can."

"Let's be off to the depot right away then, and if the train's on time, we'll have a real nice morning poking around there."

Her husband looked at her with amusement:

"Betty, you are more American than ever, in spite of your 'international marriage,' as the New York papers called it, and six weeks of my improving society! We say 'punctual' here, not 'on time,' and 'station' instead of 'depot,' if you please."

"I'll say what I like," retorted Betty, with spirit. "I'm not going to give up my own country, just because I've married an Englishman. Besides, everyone knows that we Americans have the best pronunciation, and at all events we don't drop our h's!"

"Is that innuendo aimed at me? Surely I am not guilty of letting my aspirates slide?" asked her spouse, in an injured tone; but Betty had already retired to make ready for the expedition.

She returned quickly, looking so bewitching in her newest hat, that her naïve inquiry of "Will I do?" could only be properly answered by a kiss. In a very short time they had reached their goal, and were deposited at Lower Streathing Station.

In spite of the hopelessly modern and Philistine aspect of the place Betty's heart bounded as she passed out of the station on to a wide, flat expanse of common.

"My native heather, or rather that of my ancestors," she murmured sentimentally, as her foot touched the dingy tufts, already struggling into bloom, though London fogs and smoke had done their best to blight the effort.

"Don't ask your way, Cecil," she entreated, "but let us walk right around the heath. I want to picture it as it was in my ancestor's time, when he used to gallop across, pursued by armed highwaymen. Why, he might have met Claude Duval himself here!"

"But I am afraid that he flourished at an earlier date, and followed his calling on Hounslow Heath, if my memory does not deceive me," objected her husband; "it all looks hopelessly modern, too."

As he noticed how red-brick "Queen Anne" villas and shops with plate-glass fronts had encroached on the common, he felt more than ever certain that no trace remained of the house they were seeking. The demon builder was evidently abroad in the neighbourhood, and had spared nothing that was venerable or picturesque.



Betty, however, refused to be discouraged, and, guided by an instinct that proved correct, she turned off the common into a lane shaded by ancient elm-trees, and, pointing to a high garden wall, exclaimed triumphantly :

"There it is!"

A notice was affixed to the wall, and they read: "Elmwood Grange. This valuable building estate and material of mansion for sale, in lots to suit purchaser. Apply to Messrs Jerry, builders, Wandsworth."

"I suppose that no one is living there, then," said Cecil Fane, "so perhaps we can see it."

"*Perhaps!*" cried Betty in scorn. "Of course we will see it! Do you calculate that any obstacle would keep *me* out? I'm only looking for a way in, and here I've found it," rushing to a wooden door in the wall which yielded to a touch and revealed the garden within.

Betty held her breath, she had not expected a scene of such utter desolation, even in England, which she regarded as a country of ruins.

There was a silent pathos about the neglected, weed-grown garden, tangles of bindweed were choking the raspberry canes, the fruit-trees were unpruned, the walks grass-grown, nettles and roses grew side by side in unchecked luxuriance. Only the tall phloxes and hollyhocks tried to blossom on in their untoward surroundings, "like brave spirits, undefeated by misfortune," said Betty, gathering some as a memento, and looking as if the melancholy of the place were already depressing her spirits.

A winding walk, where happy lovers might have lingered in the days of yore, led from the garden to a leafy grove; in the midst was a pond, choked with slime and water weeds, where a flat-bottomed boat was slowly falling to decay. On a little island was a summer-house, once, perhaps, the favourite playing place of a child, whose feet would never tread that ground again.

"Come away from this dismal place, Betty; it will give you the horrors," said her husband, and they wandered out into the sunshine.

Now they saw the grey old house, whose windows, mostly shattered, looked to them like sightless eyes. The lawn in front was all golden with dandelions which had overgrown the grass, the flower-beds were empty, a bramble was climbing over the broken fountain. In the elm trees by the house the rooks were cawing as if in lamentation. Year after year they had reared their callow broods there, but the nests that hung now in the branches were the last they would build in that place, for the old trees were condemned to perish.

As they lingered a voice near them broke the stillness with a cry of "Betty, Betty, come to me!"

In the silence its effect was startling. Betty turned pale and clung to her husband's arm, asking in terror, "What can it be? Is it the spook of an ancestor calling me?"

The cry was repeated, and now they saw it came from a figure seated under a lime tree at a little distance from them, a figure enveloped in wraps, despite the warmth of the July day.

Betty overcame her tremors, and hurried to the spot, asking impulsively: "Do you want me? You were calling me just now."

The figure freed itself from some of its wrappings, and proved to be that of an old man, but so worn and emaciated as scarcely to resemble a human being. The skin was like discoloured parchment, tightly stretched over the bony features, the white hair hung in elf locks from beneath a velvet cap, the hands, clasping a crutch-handled stick, were like the claws of a bird. Only the eyes seemed to *live*, and they glowed from under the shaggy brows, with a strange, unnatural fire. Betty shrank back as they turned upon her.

"Excuse me, young lady," said a broken, quavering voice, with an old-fashioned courtesy in its quaint pronunciation, "I am a very old man and was half asleep when I caught sight of you. Your face reminded me of one unseen for more than sixty years, and I live so much in the past that I had almost forgotten the present. I trust that my obliviousness did not startle you, You will greatly *oblige* me by taking a seat," pointing to a garden chair beside him, and still keeping those penetrating eyes fixed upon her.

Betty rather nervously obeyed.

"May I inquire the name of my fair visitor?" he asked.

"Betty da Castro Lincoln," she answered confused by that uncanny gaze.

"Excuse me, it is nothing of the kind," corrected a voice at her other side.

"I mean that *was* my name before I was married; I am Mrs. Cecil Fane now," she hastened to explain.

The old man did not heed the interruption.

"Betty da Castro—da Castro," he said thoughtfully. "And where do you come from?"

"From the United States of America, sir. I wanted to see this house, because my ancestors lived here. I suppose we took a liberty in walking in through the garden as we did, but I was so anxious to come, that I could not risk being refused leave."

"America! Is your mother Betty Spencer then?"

She could hardly refrain from laughing at such a question.

"Why, no, sir! She was my great-grandmother."

"Indeed? And is she quite well, my dear?"

"She has been dead for a great many years, as well as her husband, and their only child, my grandmother. My mother is the last of that family living now."

"Dead! Dead so young! Poor children, poor children, and I live on still," he murmured, half to himself; then turning to Betty he said: "You, then, are the great-granddaughter of my son, Richard

da Castro. I parted from him in anger years ago, but I am an old man now, and I am glad to see you here."

Betty almost choked with astonishment; even Cecil was moved to give a faint whistle of surprise.

"My great-great-grandpapa," she cried. "Do tell! Why, you make me smile! How mother would admire to see you! You must be nearly a century old, sir!"

"I shall be *one hundred and four* years of age in September, when I shall have lived in this house for ninety-nine years, but the lease falls in then. The old man and the old house will go together," he went on dreamily. "My father took it on a long lease, when I was a child of five. I remember the day well, he showed me the document, saying, 'Your descendants will live here, Thomas, when you and I are dead;' but he was wrong, as it proved, for the young died, and I live on. I parted from my only child in anger, aye, though he was all the world to me; but Betty Spencer came between us, with her blue eyes and her false heart. I loved her well, but she preferred the son to the father, and so they left me, sixty-two years ago. And you are my great-great-granddaughter? Time has flown after all, though it has seemed to stand still here," relapsing into silence again.

Betty felt that the moment had come to present her bridegroom.

"This is my husband; we were married in New York City six weeks ago," she said.

The old man scarcely acknowledged Cecil's presence; he sat nodding drowsily in the sunshine, until aroused by an ancient man-servant who appeared from the house, carrying a tray, which he almost dropped in his surprise at seeing strangers there.

"I've brought your glass of port, sir," he said, still gazing at the unexpected visitors, who formed a contrast to the aged man beside them, in their youth and modern aspect.

"Aye, Brown, you are a good lad—you never forget your old master. I have had a surprise, a pleasant surprise just now. Here is my great-great-granddaughter and her husband come to visit me from America."

"I'm glad to see you, sir and madam, very glad indeed!" said Brown respectfully. "In the last sixty years Mr. da Castro has not had one of his own kin near him; it is time that they came. You will come with me, and have some refreshment, won't you? The master mostly sleeps after his glass of wine."

"That is right, Brown, you look after them," said the old man, rousing up for a moment, then letting his head sink again upon his breast, and appearing unconscious of what was passing around him.

Betty's lively transatlantic curiosity was somewhat tempered with awe as they passed over the threshold into the peculiarly musty atmosphere of an old and shut up house.

The hall struck cold even on this brilliant morning, the light struggled in through window-panes obscured by dust; it was panelled in dark old oak, and hung with armour, tapestry, and pictures. Brown led the way to a room on the ground floor.

"The oak parlour," he said; "it is the only sitting-room that Mr. da Castro has used for years past. The rest are shut up and sadly neglected, but he'll have no other servants, save me and Mrs. Brown. He thinks we require no help, being still young and strong, and I seventy-four, and my missus not much younger! I often think he'll see us out yet, though, for he's a wonder for his age, he is. I came here as page-boy in the year '31, such a lively house as it was then! Visitors always coming and going, dinner-company rolling up in chariots, dancing at night in the hall, and the master, such a fine, free-spoken gentleman as you never saw. He used to ride his thorough-bred, or drive a four-in-hand, always with Mr. Richard at his side. There was little more than twenty years' difference in their ages, and I never see such love between father and son, never, until Miss Spencer came. Ah, deary me!" stopping for breath, and sighing dismally.

"Oh, tell me all about it," cried Betty eagerly. "Why did Miss Spencer come here, and was she very pretty? I want to know *all* about it."

"She was a rare beauty, ma'am. You are not unlike her, if you'll excuse the liberty; but come into the great saloon, and you shall see her picture, painted when she was staying here."

He slowly unbarred the shutters of the unused room, letting in a flood of sunshine, which revealed the dust lying thickly on the antique furniture and faded carpet. Treasures enough to make the fortune of a dealer in curios were displayed to view; there were chairs and tables of Sheraton and Chippendale make; cabinets filled with priceless china, cases of medals and miniatures, an ancient harpsichord occupied one corner of the wide fire-place, and a harp the other.

Betty tried the former, but its notes were dumb from age and damp, the harp-strings gave a ghostly twang when she touched them, and she transferred her attention to the pictures.

Brown evidently enjoyed the unwonted pleasure of acting cicerone, and assumed a tone of great importance. He halted in front of a picture representing a young man in a blue nankeen coat with large gold buttons, a frilled cambric shirt, and tight trousers, holding a pony, on which sat a pretty, laughing child clad in the sexless garments worn by little boys when the century was young.

"Mr. da Castro, and Master Richard at the age of six," he said solemnly.

Betty looked with interest at the handsome face and vigorous frame of her ancestor.

"Think of him now! Who would wish to live to his age?" she

said, with a shudder. "And who is this homely girl?"—pointing to the portrait of an insignificant damsel, in a skimpy white muslin, bending in a sentimental attitude over her harp.

"That, ma'am, was the lady of Mr. da Castro. She was not his own choice, I've been told, but his father's. Be that as it may, she did not live long, dying when Mr. Richard was born; and the master never cared for anyone but him, until Miss Spencer came."

Betty felt herself growing weary of the constant iteration of the phrase.

"Why *did* she come, anyway?" she cried impatiently.

Brown looked at her in mild reproof as he paused before a painting which presented a striking contrast to the last.

A lovely, golden-haired girl stood in a garden filling her basket with roses. Her blue eyes looked coquettishly at the spectators, as if challenging their admiration. Even the unbecoming costume and coiffure of 1832 could not disguise her beautiful face and graceful figure.

"Miss Spencer," said Brown gravely, "was the orphan daughter of a dear friend of Mr. da Castro's, who left her to his care. A lady came with her to matronise her, as the saying is, for she was but seventeen, and a beauty, as you can see. She had not been here long before both the Mr. da Castros lost their hearts to her. She encouraged first one and then the other, neither suspecting that she was playing a double game, until the day came when Mr. Richard went to tell his father of his engagement. There *was* a scene then, as you may suppose; but she went off to foreign parts with Mr. Richard as cool as possible. *He* felt it, poor lad! leaving his father and marrying like that against his wishes. They never met again. And so you tell me that he and Miss Betty are dead? Well, well, it's a strange world!

"The Grange was an altered place from that day. Mr. da Castro said nothing to nobody; but even such a little lad as I was then could see that his heart was broken. He gave up all the entertaining and company, and used to drive to his counting-house in the city, returning at night as grave as a judge. He kept only a few servants to wait on him, and as he grew older he seemed to feel it more instead of less, and as years went on the house and place got into the state in which you now see them."

"Bet, your pretty great-grandmother had something to answer for. I am afraid that she was a very naughty girl," said Cecil, as they gazed at the piquante face. "Her goings on sound most reprehensible."

"Still, she must have had *some* heart," said Betty, "or she would scarcely have married my great-grandfather and gone off to face the world with him, for I presume he was not rich."

"No, ma'am," replied Brown, "he had only his mother's fortune. It was a love-match, sure enough, only the poor master was not well

treated over it, as Miss Spencer always made him think that she loved him true. It was a blow to find that, all the time, his own son was his rival, so to speak."

In the Oak Parlour Mrs. Brown, a kind, roundabout little woman was waiting, eager to be introduced to her master's descendants; she was as loquacious as her lord, the pent-up fountain of speech seemed to burst forth at the sight of listeners.

Though she was young in the da Castro service, where she had only been for fifty years, she was full of traditions of past days, and insisted on administering some rare old port and rather mouldy cake, before she would let them go.

The old man was still sitting in the sun, and roused as they approached him.

"You will come again, my dears?" he said, and they left, promising to return on the morrow.

When the rusty gates closed behind them, Betty exclaimed:

"Was there ever such an experience? Had any young woman of twenty ever a living great-great-grandfather before? It's all perfectly lovely and romantic, the old house and the servants, and that charming ancestor! I could spend hours there."

"I call it downright indecent," answered Cecil unsympathetically; "here is an ancestor, who ought to have been snugly tucked away in his grave years ago, turning up to spoil your poor mother's nicely dated pedigree. The place is most depressing, it is impossible to realise that we are within half-an-hour of Victoria. I feel as if we had gone back to the days when the 'first gentleman in Europe' was on the throne! Brown is like the 'hoary-headed servitor' of an old-fashioned novel, long-winded yarns and all. Thank goodness, here's the station, and a train coming in! How gloriously modern it looks! Now we'll get back to town, have a ripping luncheon, then go down to Hurlingham, and forget the ancestor and the mouldering past!"

Betty was far from sharing her husband's views on the subject. She had all an American's passionate admiration for antiquities, an admiration which they combine with the most complete "up-to-dateness" in all subjects. Her ancestor seemed to possess the most unaccountable fascination for her; almost every morning they journeyed to Lower Streathing, and while Cecil wandered about with a cigar, Betty would sit under the lime-tree, listening patiently to the old man's stories of the past. He always seemed glad to see her bright face, though at times his faculties were dull, and he would remain for hours in the same position, without speaking.

Betty never wearied of wandering through the silent rooms, picturing them as they were when they rang with merriment; all the guests had passed away, and soon the old house would disappear; the knowledge of its impending fate gave it a melancholy interest in her eyes.

Brown and his wife never seemed to realise their nearness to London; they remained just simple, country folk, although the country



had been overtaken and swallowed up by town, leaving the doomed house standing alone, a solitary relic of the past, in a commercial age.

At times, however, they were troubled by the thought that in September the lease would expire, forcing them and their feeble charge to seek another home.

"The old gentleman, he do seem as confident that he'll die with the lease," said Brown one day, "but it isn't likely; he's well and strong for his years, his mind is clear, and sight and hearing as good as ever they were. It'll kill him if he's turned out on September 15th. Maybe they'd let him stay on; it couldn't be for so very long."

"We must try to arrange it. Who is Mr. da Castro's man of business?" asked Cecil Fane.

"Mr. Robertson of Red Lion Square. He is a very nice gentleman, a grandson of the one that drew up the master's will about sixty-five years ago. He often calls to ask how Mr. da Castro is."

Cecil saw Mr. Robertson, and arranged everything to his satisfaction. Should Mr. da Castro wish it, he was to be allowed to retain the house at a heavy yearly rental, for the rest of his life. The solicitor said that there could be no harm in mentioning that Mr. da Castro had never altered his will, so that if Mrs. Lincoln could prove her descent from him, she would be entitled to everything at his death. Mrs. Lincoln and her son had already arranged to come to England in the "fall," on their way to the Riviera, and would visit the old man.

There was now no reason for the Fanes to remain any longer in town, which was emptying fast, as July was nearly over, and the heat almost tropical.

Their courtship and engagement had been very brief, during a visit of Cecil Fane's to the States, so that, when they arrived in England, his house in Hampshire had to undergo alterations and repairs, and was not now ready for them.

Betty's energy was not impaired by the heat, and her husband became quite weary of the constant expeditions to the Grange.

"Really, dear," he said one morning, "you must tear yourself away from your ancestor, and let us start for Switzerland to-morrow. Town is a howling wilderness; I am the last man left, and it is very poor fun for me. He will never miss you; he has outlived all human sympathy and affection, so don't neglect me any longer for that old mummy."

Betty agreed, rather unwillingly, and after one last visit to the Grange they left for Lucerne.

Even the charms of an ancestor were eclipsed by that of the Alpine scenery through which they wandered for the next few weeks. Betty's delight in her first European travel knew no bounds. She dragged her lazy husband up mountain peaks, and through passes, made him get up at dawn to see the sun rise, and *did* everything after the

fashion of her nation. Her mountaineering exploits, however, were brought to a sudden end by an ankle sprained at Chamounix, and they were obliged to go down to the Rhone valley, and wait patiently until she was well enough to move on. The days at Martigny, at the comfortable Hotel du Cheval Blanc, passed sleepily, Betty hobbled into the garden on her husband's arm or took long, lazy drives, instead of her former walks, she was becoming accustomed to her lotus-eating existence, until one day a change came over her.

She woke one morning with a sudden start, feeling that some one had called her. She sat up in bed, the cold grey dawn was just stealing into the room, and by its faint glimmer she saw her ancestor, standing by the window, and looking earnestly at her. He wore the Turkish dressing-gown and velvet cap in which she had last seen him; to Betty's half-aroused senses there was nothing extraordinary in his appearing at that place and time.

"What is it?" she asked sleepily, "how did you come here?"

He made no reply, but kept his deep-set eyes fixed on her face, and, while she was rousing Cecil to look at him, he disappeared suddenly.

Cecil treated the matter very lightly.

"Just a vivid dream, my dear child," he said. "You are always thinking of that old ancestor, so it is quite natural that you should dream of him."

"But it was *not* a dream," Betty insisted. "I saw him just as plainly as I see you now, and oh! Cecil, have you forgotten? This is the 15th of September! Let's go back to London, for I'm sure he needs me."

As soon as it was light she summoned her maid, and directed the packing with feverish energy.

Later that morning a telegram was handed to Cecil, which said, briefly: "He died at daybreak—Lincoln."

"There," said Betty. "You see that I was right, and it *was* his spirit. He went with the house, as he always said he would, and came to bid me good-bye first. I'm truly glad that mother and Dick were with him, so his death was not as lonely as his life had been."

Directly they reached London she hurried down to the Grange. It looked more forlorn than usual on that bright autumn morning, with closely drawn blinds. Mrs. Lincoln had arrived on the afternoon of the 14th, and said that the old man was delighted to see her. His mind was quite clear, and he listened with interest to her recollections of his son, her grandfather. He told her that everything in the house was hers, except his picture and that of Betty Spencer.

"They are for your Betty," he said; "give her my love; she has brightened my last days."

He became weaker as evening drew on, they watched him all that night, but there was no change until the day began to break, when

he opened his eyes with a sudden cry of "Betty," then closed them in a sleep that knew no earthly waking.

There was no one besides his four descendants, the solicitor, and his faithful servants at the grave of the old man who had outlived all human ties; they laid him beside the wife of one short year, who had gone on so long before; and then the work of dismantling the Grange began.

When the last van-load of furniture had left, Betty went once more through the empty silent rooms, feeling as if the old house were a sentient thing that knew its end drew near. She shuddered as they turned the key in the lock and went away, leaving the doomed house awaiting its destruction.

The Fanes left for Hampshire the next day, taking old Brown and his wife, who were to have a cottage on the estate, and a pension, as a token of Betty's gratitude for their care of her ancestor.

She was fully occupied all that winter, in settling down to English country life, and in the early summer her son and heir was born. The only drawback to her bliss was that her great-great-grandfather had not lived to see this latest descendant.

It was not until the first anniversary of the old man's death that she was able to make another pilgrimage to Lower Streathing. Then she almost wished she had not gone; but instead, retained her impression of Elmwood Grange as she last saw it, for now all trace of it had vanished from the earth. An "estate" of brand-new red brick houses had arisen in its stead, every trim villa was already occupied, their front gardens were gay with stocks and asters, canaries sang in the white-curtained windows, where wax fruits and stuffed birds were displayed. No iconoclast had ever wrought more destruction than those builders; the "immemorial elms" had fallen before them, like saplings in a storm, and, though a fruit tree here and there had been spared, it was only to enhance the value of an infinitesimal back-garden.

Betty hurried away, feeling as if Elmwood Grange and her ancestor were part of a by-gone dream, and this the prosaic reality.

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## AN ENCHANTED CITY.

By day the country's passing sweet,  
 The town is full of dust and fret,  
 Yet seek some quiet urban street  
 After the sun is set.  
 Here mysteries undreamt of are,  
 For commonplace of brick and stone,  
 Each glimmering lamp a yellow star,  
 Points to a realm unknown.  
 Yon shadowy house—erewhile so bold,  
 You passed it with disdainful glance—  
 At twilight seen, its own might hold  
 In some bygone romance.  
 Parterres and gardens neat and trim,  
 Whose flaunting colours vexed the eye,  
 Now stretch in softened outline dim  
 Beneath a sapphire sky.  
 The darkening trees, begrimed with smoke,  
 Now shimmer decked with silvery lights,  
 Or wave gaunt arms, like phantom folk,  
 On wet autumnal nights.  
 Here glows a window brightly lit,  
 There unseen hands unbar a door;  
 A voice—another answering it—  
 Then silence falls once more.  
 Late wheels roll home from ball and rout,  
 The children long since left their play,  
 And one by one the stars come out,  
 And footsteps die away.  
 The shadows deepen clear and thin,  
 From gleaming spires and misty towers;  
 Unheeded clocks, with clamorous din,  
 Proclaim the fleeting hours.  
 Still pasture-land and lonely down  
 Are scarcely more from strife withdrawn  
 Than is this hush'd, enchanted town  
 Between the dark and dawn.  
 Familiar scenes with mystery blent,  
 A world where sleep and silence reign,  
 Till day brings disillusionment—  
 Life's Prose begins again!

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

